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CASTE, CONFLICT, AND IDEOLOGY

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29 Ian Stone: *Canal Irrigation in British India: Perspectives on Technological Change in a Peasant Economy*
30 Rosalind O'Hanlon: *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*
31 Ayesha Jalal: *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*
32 Neil Charlesworth: *Peasants and Imperial Rule: Agriculture and Agrarian Society in the Bombay Presidency, 1850–1935*
33 Claude Markovits: *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931–9: The Indigenous Capitalist Class and the Rise of the Congress Party*

CASTE, CONFLICT, AND IDEOLOGY

MAHATMA JOTIRAO PHULE AND LOW CASTE PROTEST IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY WESTERN INDIA

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CONTENTS

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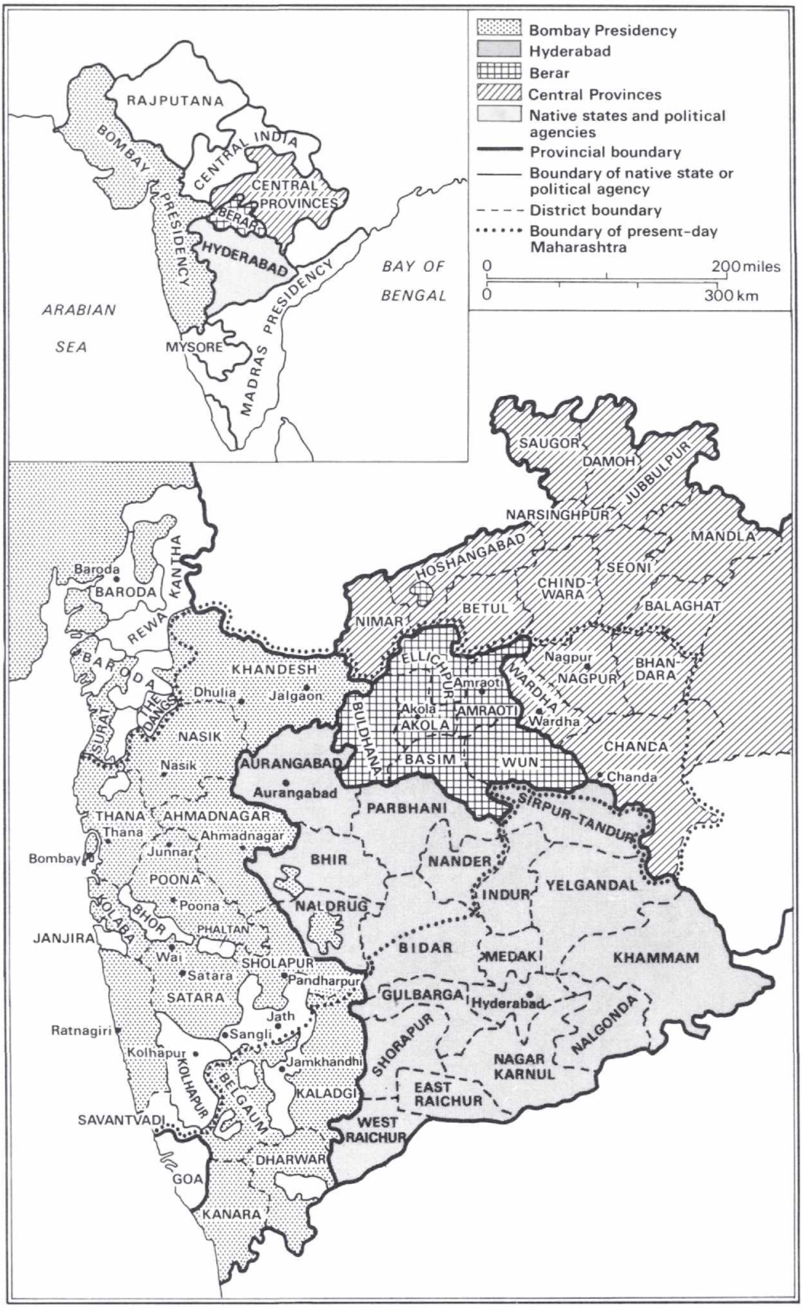
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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Almost all the material used in this study is in Marathi. All translations are my own, and I have tried to render these as accurately as possible. All quotations from Phule's work are taken from the recently published collection, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, edited by D. Keer and S. G. Malshe, Pune 1969, unless otherwise stated. I have avoided anglicising quotations in order to retain the striking originality of Phule's poetry and prose, and their vivid imagery of the lives of the lower castes. This occasionally leads to an awkward construction, but preserves the style of the original. Where matters of translation are in doubt, I have used Molesworth's *Marathi–English Dictionary*, published in 1857. For the convenience of the reader, I have translated the titles of all Marathi books into English, with the exception of recently published secondary sources. I have indicated in brackets that the work is in Marathi when it is first referred to in each chapter, and again in the Bibliography. The system of transliteration that I have used for Marathi words is that of the American Library of Congress Catalogue, with two variations. I have omitted all diacritical marks, on the grounds that these are not strictly necessary in a work of this kind, and make reading less easy for the reader without a familiarity with the Devanagari script. I have transcribed the Marathi letters 'ca' and 'sa', which occur, for example, in the words 'Chavan' and 'Shivaji', as 'Ch' and 'Sh'. Without diacritical marks, this is closer to their Marathi pronunciation than would be the formally accurate 'Cavan' and 'Sivaji'. Where a word is already very familiar in its anglicised form, I have kept to that, rather than rendering it according to the method of transliteration described above.

A NOTE ABOUT THE AREA UNDER STUDY

A common problem of writing about India under British rule is that of finding a convenient name for the geographical area under discussion. Where this does not coincide with any of the administrative and political divisions of Presidency and princely state, which were made by the British rulers, it becomes difficult to find a term which is accurate without being awkwardly long. The area dealt with in this work, to which I refer as 'western India' or 'Maharashtra', is that of the present-day state of Maharashtra, excluding the regions of Marathavada and Vidharba, which in the nineteenth century formed a part of the Nizam's state of Hyderabad, and of the Central Provinces and Berar, respectively. In other words, I am concerned with the Marathi-speaking areas of the Bombay Presidency, as shown on the accompanying map. I have also deliberately used the term 'Maharashtra' in some parts of the book, although of course no such administrative unit existed in this period. I have used the term because it seems the best, indeed the only way, to denote the linguistic and cultural domain in which were carried on the movements and conflicts which form the subject of this book.



Western and central India in 1885

PART 1

Introduction

1
Low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India

Jotirao Govindrao Phule was the son of an obscure lower caste family who pioneered the attack on the religious authority of Brahmans, and their predominance in the institutions of the British government and administration. He was born in Pune in the Deccan, shortly after the East India Company's assumption of power in western India, into a family of fruit-and-vegetable growers. Phule's antecedents were not such as to suggest any great aptitude in the field of ideas, or for commanding the loyalties of large numbers of men. Yet his initiative set off a broad and very active movement of the lower castes which was to have a profound effect upon the growth of political organisation in the Bombay Presidency, and the shaping of the nationalist movement towards the end of the century.

An enormous amount of scholarly effort has gone into tracing the origins and development of the varieties of nationalist movements in India and, in particular, the history of the Indian National Congress.[1] In comparison, historians have given much less attention to the organisations and ideologies which arose amongst the lower caste social groups who took no part in early nationalist politics, or who actively opposed their programmes. In part, this relative neglect has arisen from the very magnetism of the nationalist movement itself, of the personalities that led it, and of the cause that they championed with such fervour. Difficulties of evidence have also contributed. It has always been notoriously difficult to document 'popular' political or ideological activity, in societies where the great majority of the population lack even the most basic skills of literacy. The lower castes of western India are no exception to this. For the western historian, the problem is also one of language. Even when lower caste leaders were able to read and write, few of them possessed a command of fluent English, and none of them wrote substantially in English. Their use of the Marathi vernacu-

1 The most important of these for western India are Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880–1915*, Cambridge University Press 1973; and J. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974.

lar was, moreover, of a rustic and unsophisticated kind that was criticised by their own higher caste contemporaries as uneducated, and that strikes even the modern Marathi reader as awkward and at times obscure. Yet our understanding of this area of South Asian history will remain a partial and distorted one until we do make a concerted attempt to understand the experience of these activists and of their followers amongst the peasant cultivators and urban lower castes of the Bombay Presidency.

The world into which Phule was born, in 1827, had just undergone a number of rapid and dramatic changes. While these reduced the liberties of all Indians in important respects, they held out the promise of new freedoms and opportunities in others. The chief of these changes was the East India Company's defeat and deposition of the peshwa, Bajirao II, in 1818. The peshwa-ship was the office of chief minister to the Maratha Rajas of Satara. The latter were the descendants of the seventeenth-century Maratha warrior hero, Shivaji Bhosale, who led the triumphant expansion of Maratha power against the Mughal rulers in Delhi and their representatives in western India. During the century after Shivaji's death in 1680, real power in the Maratha state passed out of the hands of his descendants. A number of Maratha chiefs emerged as powers in their own right, with large territories in western and central India. At the same time the peshwas increased their own power at the expense of the Rajas of Satara. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Raja Shahu II and his family were held in confinement at Satara, important only for their formal power to confer office on a new peshwa.

Since the rule of the peshwas was accompanied by a progressive fragmentation and decline of the power of the Marathas, and their ultimate defeat by the East India Company, the quality of their government, and especially that of the last peshwa, Bajirao II, has always been a sensitive issue, and remains so in Maharashtra today. It is certain, however, that western India under peshwa rule did represent, in religious terms, a relatively 'closed' society compared with that which developed under East India Company rule. Certain kinds of upward social mobility had, of course, always been possible in pre-nineteenth-century society. Individuals and whole castes could improve their position in economic terms. Such mobility would often be followed by the pursuit of higher ritual status, and castes would 'Sanskritise' their religious and social practices by assuming those appropriate to groups above them in the hierarchy.

Changes of status across the larger hierarchy into which Hindu society was divided presented a more difficult problem. The *varna*, or

category of Brahmans, stood first in this. Their ritual purity formed the basis of their office as the priests of the Hindus, while their ancient association with literacy and learning fitted them also for a range of administrative and professional occupations. At the other end of the religious hierarchy were the members of the *Shudra varna*, whose ritual impurity fitted their role as the servants and the providers of material support for the rest of society. The two intermediate *varna* categories were those of the *Kshatriya*, or warrior, and the *Vaishya*, or merchant.[2] In practice, of course, some western Indian castes who fell into the *Shudra* category occupied positions of considerable local respectability and affluence. The great proportion of agricultural castes, which included substantial landowners, were usually classed as *Shudras*. Yet this material prosperity, however widespread, did not affect more fundamental Hindu attitudes towards the *dharma*, or code of worldly conduct considered proper for *Shudras*; attitudes that were held both by Brahman religious authorities, and by the lower castes themselves. The most important of these, from the point of view of the changes that were to take place in the nineteenth century, concerned education and learning. Orthodox Hindus regarded these skills as most appropriate to the higher castes: either to Brahmans, carrying on a tradition of religious learning, or to one of the 'writer' castes, who made a living in government or commercial clerical employment. While it was no doubt possible for small numbers of the lower castes to acquire some sort of education under peshwa rule, contemporary Hindu attitudes to the education of *Shudras* made it very unlikely that facilities would ever be made available for their teaching on any large scale. In part, of course, the problem was one of finance, as well as convention. Most of the lower castes, employed as cultivators or labourers, were simply too poor to afford the luxury of education. Yet Hindu values did play a very important part in shaping opportunities for literacy and learning. Bajirao II, for example, himself a Chitpavan Brahman, distributed very generous sums of money to the large community of Brahman scholars in the city of Pune to enable them to devote their time to religious scholarship.

In practice, of course, the onset of East India Company government ushered in no sudden golden age of lower caste education. Yet it did bring some signs of widening educational opportunities. First, the collapse of the rule of the peshwas brought an end to an important function which had distinguished its government, the state's active support of Hindu religious values, by acting as the executive power of

2 The best general introduction to these religious hierarchies is in Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, The Free Press, New York 1958, pp. 55–100.

Brahman religious authorities.[3] The severing of this connection, and the change in the attitude of the state which it implied, gave ground to hope for the provision of schools and colleges to which all would have equal access. This hope was realised, not so much by the East India Company, but in the burgeoning of educational establishments of all kinds in the hands of the protestant missionaries. The missionaries saw in the lower and untouchable castes a most fertile ground for proselytisation. They did their utmost to persuade their audiences that the Hindu religion had deprived them, as *Shudras*, of their real rights in matters of education and religion. For men like Jotirao Phule who attended these schools, the onset of Company rule indeed appeared to bring new opportunities for their own advancement, and for a more fundamental change in attitudes towards their status as *Shudras*.

At the same time that this change of government raised such hopes, new clouds appeared to darken the horizon of those seeking far-reaching social change. As the Company's political and administrative institutions grew in size and extended more deeply into Indian society, it became clear that they offered great possibilities, both of emolument and of influence, to those Indians able to find employment in them. Most importantly, they would gain a strategic mediatory position between the Company's government and the larger masses of western Indian society. This dimension of control in administrative institutions – from local educational establishments to the conduct of rent and remission assessments, and even the ability to influence simple administrative procedures in the local courts – impinged forcibly upon local society.

Other, more obviously 'political', kinds of power awaited those Indians who from the mid-century were able to respond to the growth of British institutions with organisations of their own that were directed at engaging and influencing those of the British government. In western India, these efforts culminated in the formation of public associations such as the Pune Sarvajanik Sabha, formed in 1870; at the all-India level, of course, they reached fruition in the Indian National Congress. In addition to the opportunities that they gained for influencing short-term British policy, these early political organisations were very well placed to play some part in shaping the future development of India's political institutions. When, from the 1870s, limited ideas of a devolution of power to Indians themselves became current, such

3 For a description of this role, see Hiroshi Fukazawa, 'State and Caste System (Jati) in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom', *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, vol. 9, no. 1, June 1968.

influence took on an even greater significance. This was apparent to no one more than to radical leaders of the lower castes.

These new opportunities for administrative and political power required very similar skills from those who wished to exploit either of them. Above all, these skills consisted of a high degree of literacy; a command of fluent English; a familiarity with new administrative procedures, experience of urban as well as rural, British as well as Indian society; and, for preference, some kind of professional qualification. It was here that older attitudes about education influenced the ability of different groups to respond to these opportunities. The old association of the higher castes with the skills of literacy gave them a much greater flexibility and readiness to exploit these new possibilities than was possessed by any of western India's agricultural or urban lower castes. The result of this disparity was that the higher castes, and Brahmans in particular, came to occupy a proportion of clerical and professional positions at all levels of the British administration that was far in excess of their numerical proportions in the population as a whole.[4]

It was here that lower caste leaders perceived their caste-fellows to be so acutely disadvantaged. Far from breaking down inequalities within western Indian society, British rule looked as though it might reinforce them by adding to the older religious authority of Brahmans a formidable new range of administrative and political powers. In an assumption typical of such radical and 'oppositional' movements, moreover, men like Phule were convinced of some kind of deliberate collusion or conspiracy between the different interests that conflicted with their own. They argued that Brahmans in different spheres of politics and religion would naturally combine to protect their advantages, and to reinforce their powers over the lower castes. In their efforts, Brahmans would find the conservative attitudes of these castes themselves to be their greatest ally. Phule and his colleagues drew from this the conclusion that a rejection of Brahman religious authority, and of the hierarchical values on which it was based, formed the precondition for any real change in their condition. They also hoped for a long

4 See, for example, Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press 1968. A revealing set of figures given by Seal for the year 1886–7, that of the caste of persons employed in the executive and judicial branches of the Uncovenanted Service in the Bombay Presidency – the elite of the Indian administrative hierarchy – shows that of the 384 persons employed in this capacity, 328 were Hindus, of which 211 were Brahmans, 26 *Kshatriyas*, 37 *Prabhus*, 38 *Vaishyas* or *Banias*, 1 *Shudra*, and 15 others. The categories used here confuse the *jati* with the *varna* grouping and are no doubt very crude, but the figures do give an indication of the relative proportion of Brahmans to *Shudras*, the category with which Phule would have been concerned. Seal, p. 118.

period of benevolent paternal rule by the British while the lower castes developed the skills and social resources that they had failed to acquire in pre-nineteenth-century society.

The deep religious conservatism of these same groups presented one of the main obstacles to this ambitious programme of reform. It was in meeting this challenge, and in establishing an ideological basis for a revolution in social and religious values, that Phule and his fellow radicals displayed their greatest talents. In a brilliant effort of creativity and imagination, they projected a new collective identity for all Maharashtra's lower castes. In their 'discovery' of this identity, which lay obscured by the fictions in Hindu representations of the proper ordering of society, they drew on existing symbols from Maharashtra's warrior and agricultural traditions, and gave them a powerful new meaning. In this manipulation of symbols, religious rituals, and conflicts, and other elements in popular culture, lower caste radicals displayed a highly sophisticated understanding of the process of identity formation. This gives their efforts an absorbing interest for historians and anthropologists alike.

The popular movements that resulted from their efforts influenced the very structure of politics and political debate in the Bombay Presidency. First, their attempts to appropriate important symbols in popular culture created a much wider consciousness of the possible 'meanings' that might be attached to Maharashtra's history and traditions, and sparked off an intense debate as polemicists of all shades of political opinion advanced their competing interpretations. This debate was much less 'visible' than those over the more immediate issues of British rule, but the stakes were of equal, if not greater, importance. At issue was the control of the symbols that would give Indian politicians their eagerly sought access to social and religious loyalties already in existence amongst the masses of Hindus themselves. Secondly, these movements of non-Brahmans deprived the emerging nationalist movement in western India both of a considerable body of support, and of the considerable ideological advantages that nationalists would have gained in their arguments with the British government from a monopoly of Maharashtra's symbolic resources.

In this way, the study of lower caste movements and ideologies helps to turn our attention to that much neglected area of Indian politics in the nineteenth century: the tensions and rivalries between social groups within Indian society. These movements also present a number of other important questions that may have relevance for other areas of South Asian history. The first is whether non-Brahman ideology developed out of real caste antagonism within Indian society and, if so, how far

this hostility was already present within western Indian society, and how far it was the product of conditions created by British rule. Clearly associated with this problem is the question of whether non-Brahman ideologues and activists formed an elite that was in some sense separate from the interest groups which they claimed to represent. If this was so, it becomes necessary to ask if their activity can be distinguished in any real way from that of other elites, or whether, indeed, all such political conflict represented an expression of factional fighting between elite groups, each of whom claimed to represent the 'real' opinions and interests of the people of Maharashtra. The last question concerns the status of non-Brahman ideas as ideology. This raises the perennial problem of political and other ideologies: whether we are to understand them as a veneer put upon more practical material interests, or whether we should accept them in some sense as carrying genuine affect and commitment for those who held them at the same time as they embodied what their protagonists thought to be some vital interest or need.

With a few exceptions, scholarly interest in non-Brahman movements and ideologies has grown up relatively recently, and has focused primarily upon conflicts between Brahmans and other castes in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies. For the former, we have Eugene Irschick's work, [5] and that by Marguerite Ross Barnett on the politics and ideology of Tamil nationalism.[6] For the Bombay Presidency, Gail Omvedt's work on the non-Brahman movement between 1873 and 1930 has been of great value in opening up a very large new field for western scholars, and bringing their attention to an important and neglected section of Maharashtrian society.[7] This study owes a great deal to the basic lineaments of non-Brahman political and ideological activity set out in this work. In recent years, interest has also grown in movements that were often associated with, or were offshoots from, non-Brahman ideologies – those amongst untouchable castes in the different provinces of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What usually distinguished these movements was their perception of all caste Hindus, rather than merely Brahmans, as the supporters of the oppressive hierarchies of caste. Poineering work here has been done by Eleanor

5 Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism 1916–1929*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969.

6 Marguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, Princeton University Press 1976.

7 Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay 1976.

Zelliot for the Bombay Presidency,[8] and by Mark Juergensmeyer for the Punjab.[9]

The present study shares much in common with these and the information and interpretations which they have provided have been invaluable. It also has its own different emphasis. This derives from what I have felt to be a basic and primary need in the study of non-Brahman ideology and politics which is not always met in existing secondary works. This is to explore in detail the actual content of ideology, the ideas and arguments that non-Brahmans themselves put forward to rally popular support to their belief in the oppressiveness of Brahmanic religious values, and the evil effects of the latter upon the lower castes in the nineteenth century. This study is based on the assumption that we can learn much more about the real origins of non-Brahman politics and ideology, and the social context which shaped them, by examining the actual content of non-Brahman ideas, and preferably from their Marathi sources, than by passing straight to a ready-made set of political and economic interests supposed to have been the 'real' force behind them. Such interests themselves cannot be properly understood outside the ideological context in which they are articulated. The main part of this study is therefore devoted to a detailed exposition of the ideas and arguments of the first leader and most influential theoretician of the movement of lower caste protest in nineteenth-century Maharashtra, Mahatma Jotirao Phule. These are first set within their broader social context and shown in their relationship to the new conditions imposed by British rule.

One further point should be clarified here. This concerns the arguments that will be used here about the 'origins' of new ideologies such as those that informed the work of Phule and his colleagues. To talk about the 'origins' of an idea or movement is to talk about both the conditions which caused them and those which gave them their peculiar shape or means of expression. For the former, it is necessary to take into account not only what their protagonists themselves say prompted them to action, but also motives which they may have concealed deliberately, and larger social forces of which they may not have been aware. In explaining the first of these, it may be possible in some cases to say that what they said was true – that the external conditions cited as the cause did actually exist. This would, of course, still leave us with

8 Eleanor Zelliot, 'Learning the Use of Political Means: The Mahars of Maharashtra' in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics*, Orient Longman, New Delhi 1970; and 'Religion and Legitimation in the Mahar Movement', in Bardwell Smith (ed.), *Religion and Legitimation in South Asia,* E. J. Brill, Leiden 1978.

9 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement Against Untouchability in 20th-Century Punjab*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1982.

the much more difficult task of understanding how these objective conditions were incorporated into a larger ideological scheme, and why these, and not others, should suddenly have assumed a new importance. This bears upon our understanding of the origins of Phule's ideas. His argument about Brahmans in the British administration formed the basis of many of his other ideas about the nature of Brahman power: that Brahmans used their secular powers to protect the orthodox religious values with which they identified, or to aggrandise their own personal positions in some more material way. What I would like to argue here is that the second and third statements here require a different kind of explanation from the first. Phule's contention about the proportions of Brahmans in the British administration in the period in which he wrote does have a clearly identifiable basis in objective reality. The second and third statements might well have had some objective basis, but this is by no means obvious and, as clearly polemical statements, they are better understood in the quite different context of Phule's belief in the conspiratorial nature of all Brahman activities.

We turn now to examine the area of social structure from which Phule's movement arose.

PART 2

Religion and society under early British rule

2

From warrior traditions to nineteenth-century politics: structure, ideology, and identity in the Maratha-kunbi caste complex

Introduction

In recent years, the perspectives provided by the history of specific castes or caste groupings have proved increasingly useful to historians looking at the broader changes taking place in South Asian society.[1] This focus upon individual castes, and their changing fortunes under British rule, has acted as a healthy counter-balance to the study of political change in the larger societies of region and Presidency. Regional political studies, with their emphasis on British administrative and political institutions, have illustrated the complex interactions that lay behind the growth of some of the predominant styles of political organisation amongst Indians themselves. However, too great a preoccupation with the political responses of those who responded rapidly and directly to the extensions of British institutions leaves us in danger of undervaluing the very important role that older caste groupings, identities and ideologies played in the political mobilisation of many other areas of South Asian society.

There is a need to recognise that older groupings and identities formed the ideological background to the competing attempts of castes at all levels to adapt to the decay of some kinds of power and opportunity, and to their re-creation in new areas of society.

We may well be convinced, in principle, of the need for a wider definition of what constitutes 'political' activity in nineteenth-century South Asia. However, this shift of emphasis towards the investigation of older social structures and group identities, and their role in the nineteenth century, brings its own set of problems. It is notoriously difficult to find reliable evidence for very many aspects of popular culture and social structure under British rule, let alone for any earlier period. We tend naturally to know most about the small, high caste

1 Some examples of these are Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847–1930*, Sussex University Press 1976; and Karen I. Leonard, *The Social History of an Indian Caste: the Kayasths of Hyderabad*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978; and Frank F. Conlon, *A Caste in a Changing World: The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmans, 1700–1935*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1977.

communities of the literate; about urban societies; and about those in the centres of political power. The farther we move from these narrow circles, towards the much larger groupings of pre-literate peasant, artisan and small trading castes, the less information we have.

This problem is acute for the historian of the western, Marathi-speaking areas of the Bombay Presidency. There is relatively little difficulty where some castes and occupational groups are concerned. We have, for example, quite a lot of information about the internal history of Chitpavan Brahman castes, the caste-fellows of the Maratha peshwas, by whom western India was ruled for most of the eighteenth century.[2] Yet when we turn to Maharashtra's very large cluster of peasant castes, there appears to be very little information about vital aspects of its social and religious life until well into the nineteenth century.

This caste grouping has been given various names, but is best known as the Maratha-*kunbi* cluster of castes.[3] This grouping seems always to have had a distinctive internal structure. At the lower levels, at least of status, and largely of economic resources, are the ordinary *kunbis*, or cultivators. The Marathi term *kunbi* is the generic term for all those who work on the land. The term represents something of a problem. *Kunbis* are not a sub-caste in the normal endogamous sense, but are rather all those who till or otherwise work on the land, and who are of no other caste. An indicator of this inclusiveness is that it appears to have been possible to 'become' a *kunbi*, in a way that would never have been possible with conventional endogamous sub-castes. R. E. Enthoven, one of the closest observers of western Indian society, recorded that it was quite common for families of the Koli or fisher caste to take up agriculture, and to become accepted as *kunbis* in the local community.[4]

The term 'Maratha', the other half of the title, is of equal complexity. At the simplest level, the term seems to have been used, on its own, to denote all Marathi-speakers. This was certainly the sense in which European observers of the late eighteenth century understood the

2 See, for example, M. Patterson, 'Changing Patterns of Occupations among Chitpavan Brahmans', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 7 (1970), pp. 375–96; and 'Chitpavan Brahman Family Histories: Sources for a Study of Social Structure and Social Change in Maharashtra', in M. Singer and B. S. Cohn (eds.), *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, Aldine Press, Chicago 1968, pp. 397–411.

3 For an account of this group of castes in present-day Maharashtra, see I. Karve, *Hindu Society – An Interpretation*, Deccan College Press, Pune 1968, pp. 19–22; and Henry Orenstein, 'Caste and the Concept "Maratha" in Maharashtra', *Eastern Anthropologist*, XVI, pp. 1–9.

4 See R. E. Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, Bombay 1922, vol. II, p. 257.

term.[5] Marathas were all those Marathi-speakers who had fought under the banner of Shivaji Bhosale. They were those who, in the eighteenth century, had joined under the banner of the peshwas to fight first the Mughals, and later the forces of the East India Company. To European observers at least, the term was not in any sense caste-specific. All Marathi-speakers, whether Brahman priests and ministers, soldiers, cultivators, artisans, or tradesmen, who had lived through this great era of Maratha power, might indiscriminately be called Marathas.

This usage pointed, perhaps unconsciously, to the association of the term with rulership, with mastery over the land and, most of all, with military prowess and heroism. Indeed, very many early European writers carried this much further and assumed the existence of a strong sense of regional identity that pervaded all levels of society, and served to focus the loyalty of all Marathas upon the heroic qualities and traditions of their 'race'.[6] What this assumption ignored, however, was the evidence that there was a level on which the term was applied in a narrower and more caste-specific way. Within the larger complex of peasant castes, those families who called themselves 'Marathas' rather than *kunbis* seem to have represented a small social elite, although the dividing-line between them was by no means clear or rigid. These *assal* or 'true' Maratha families claimed a genealogical link with the old kingly Rajput families of northern India. They also claimed the *varna* status of *Kshatriya* that was appropriate to a ruler or a king, whereas the ordinary *kunbi* family accepted the *varna* status of the *Shudra*, the servants of the other three *varnas*. The Maratha families attempted to demonstrate their genealogical connections with the Rajputs of ancient India through the four lineages, or *vansha*, into which the latter were divided.[7] These lineages were given the names of Solar, Lunar, Shesh, and Brahma. There were in theory only ninety-six 'pure' Maratha families, who could trace their lineage to one of the four. However, the exact names of the ninety-six families seem to have been a subject of much dispute, and different authorities could produce lists of names that were quite at variance with one another. To add to the confusion,

5 The most obvious example here, of course, is Grant Duff's *A history of the Mahrattas*, first published in 1826, which was to remain the standard English-language history of Maharashtra until well into the next century. Another early-nineteenth-century observer, Thomas Broughton, described how: 'The Mahrattas may be divided into two grand classes: the first consisting entirely of Brahmuns; the second comprehending almost all the inferior castes of the Hindoos.' Thomas Duer Broughton, *Letters Written in a Mahratta Camp during the year 1809*, John Murray, London 1813, p. 76.

6 See, for example, the description of Maratha society in John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India, including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces*, London 1832, pp. 68–77.

7 For information about these lineages, see J. Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Oxford University Press 1920, pp. 23–45.

the same names were also simply adopted by ordinary cultivator or *kunbi* families. This might be an example of what the Bombay Gazetteer called 'the general Deccan practice of calling a chief's retainers by the chief's surname'.[8] Alternatively, it might be a deliberate attempt at upward social mobility by a well-to-do *kunbi* family, seeking to gain admission to the elite circles of the Marathas by acquiring the necessary genealogy, and persuading established, and perhaps less prosperous, Maratha families to form marriage connections with them. As we shall see, it was almost a cliché of social commentators, towards the end of the nineteenth century at least, that any well-to-do *kunbi* family could win eventual acceptance in the circles of elite Marathas. This was most neatly summed up in the common Marathi proverb, '*kunbi majhala Maratha jhala*'; 'when a kunbi prospers, he becomes a Maratha'.[9]

Despite this flexibility of boundary between the small circle of elite families popularly accepted as 'true' Marathas and the larger mass of *kunbi* cultivators, there were quite distinct differences between some of the ritual and social practices of the two groups. These derived from two quite separate sources. The first was the Maratha aspiration to a *Kshatriya* status. This meant that young males of Maratha families should be invested with the sacred thread, the mark of the Hindu twice-born, that was the privilege of the Brahman, *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya varnas*, and denied to the *Shudras*, the servants of the other three. The claim to the status of a Maratha *Kshatriya* also meant that some of the domestic rituals of the Maratha families – chiefly those connected with marriage and with death – should be carried out by the Brahman priest with sacred texts drawn from the Vedas. Castes of the *Shudra varna*, on the other hand, were entitled only to words drawn from the less sacred Hindu *puranas*.

The second source of difference in the domestic and social practices of the Maratha families derived from their close historical association with some of the Muslim Courts of central and western India, such as those of Hyderabad and Bijapur, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This, often close, association with the representatives of Mughal power meant that some essentially Islamic domestic practices became associated in western India with an elite status. These were integrated into the broader collection of beliefs, aspirations, and social

8 *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. XXIV, Kolhapur, Bombay 1886, p. 66.

9 See R. M. Enthoven. *Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, vol. II, p. 286. The word *majhala* also has the implication of becoming arrogant, or assuming airs beyond one's proper position in society. For an account of the role of this lineage ideology in present-day Maharashtra, see Anthony T. Carter, 'Caste Boundaries and the Principle of Kinship Amity: A Maratha Caste Purana', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol 9, No. 1, 1979.

practices that were associated with the status of a Maratha *Kshatriya*. The most obvious borrowing from the Muslims was the seclusion of women. As we shall see, there were others, such as the habit of eating from a single dish amongst caste-fellows. The distinctiveness of some aspects of Maratha social life led to the coining of a single Marathi term for them: *Marathmola*. This translates as 'the ways and practices peculiar to the genuine Maratha', especially implying 'the non-appearance of the women of the household before strangers'.[10] In this way, the elite social status expressed in the term 'Maratha' had its historical roots in at least two quite separate traditions. The first was a conventional Hindu one, reflected in the concern with *Kshatriya* status. The second went outside the range of mainstream Hindu social practice to give a distinctively Islamic flavour to this elite Maratha identity.

Some of these aspects of local social structure and elite Maratha ideology can be seen more concretely in the events surrounding the coronation of the great Maratha leader Shivaji Bhosale, in 1674. The circumstances of the coronation are themselves a matter for disagreement among scholars. However, the main outlines of the event, which are what are needed for the present argument, are clear. After his brilliant military successes against the Mughal power in many different parts of the sub-continent, Shivaji and his supporters decided that the title of 'Chatrapati' should be conferred upon him. This denotes one who is entitled to have a *chatra*: a large parasol or canopy, usually of red silk, and a sign of dignity and grandeur, such as might be placed over a king, or a Hindu religious image or idol of great importance. The title of Chatrapati, 'the Lord of the Chatra' thus implied rulership, the position of a king amongst the Hindus, and would have given to Shivaji a formal recognition of his *de facto* position as a great military leader.[11] However, the proposal to confer this title upon Shivaji raised great controversy. For the title to be given, Shivaji would first have to be declared a pure *Kshatriya*. He would have to be admitted formally into this *varna* of rulers and kings, with the investiture of the sacred thread and the chanting of the full scriptural texts from the Vedas. Some sections of Brahman opinion objected to this on the grounds that it was very hard for any family to prove beyond doubt a pure *Kshatriya* descent. It was certainly impossible for a family of humble origins such as the Bhosales, who traced their descent from a headman or *patil* of a

10 This is the definition given in James Molesworth's *Marathi-English Dictionary*, p. 634. This dictionary was first published in 1847, and remains the standard work of reference for the student of nineteenth-century Marathi.

11 For a more detailed etymology of the term, see Molesworth's *Marathi-English Dictionary*, p. 298.

handful of villages near Pune, and whose sons had taken military service under the Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar. Shivaji therefore engaged a Brahman of Banaras, called Gagabhat, to investigate the lineage of the Bhosale family. After much deliberation and persuasion, Gagabhat declared that the Bhosales could claim a direct line of descent from the Sisode Rajput kings of Udepur. Like them, the Bhosales were representatives of the Solar line, descended from the mythical hero Ramachandra, whose standing as *Kshatriyas* could not be questioned. Shivaji's credentials thus having been satisfactorily established, the coronation went ahead, and Shivaji received his formal title of Chatrapati, a King of the Hindus.[12]

So far, our description of this area of social structure has been a general and deliberately impressionistic one. It has intended to convey an overall idea of some of the issues, in regional culture and elite ideology, that were present at the onset of East India Company rule and that were to become vitally important later in the nineteenth century in non-Brahman ideology. It should be emphasised that this description of important themes in the structure and the history of the Maratha-*kunbi* complex is intended only as an introduction to the issues, which is essential before any detailed argument can be put forward.

Three aspects of this area of regional social structure were to assume importance, in ways both practical and ideological, in the non-Brahman movement of the later nineteenth century. The first was the existence of a movement of upward mobility, as wealthy and powerful *kunbi* families laid claim to the status and identity of *Kshatriyas*. The ideology of *Kshatriya* status was, reinterpreted, to provide the core for non-Brahman polemicists' projections of the identity of the lower castes. The second aspect was the role that claims to such a status, or the denial of such claims, could play in the more practical political rivalries between Brahmans and elite Maratha families. This issue was to erupt in a complex and violent dispute in the 1820s between Pratapsinh Bhosale of Satara, the Chatrapati newly installed by the East India Company's forces, and the Chitpavan Brahmans of western Maharashtra. Both the longer tradition of tension between Brahmans and Marathas over the existence of a pure *Kshatriya varna*, and the dispute

12 For a fuller account of Shivaji's coronation, see Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and his Times*, Orient Longman, New Delhi 1973, pp. 202–11. Although Shivaji was installed as Chatrapati, it has always been a matter of dispute as to whether he was allowed to repeat the most holy Vedic text of all, the *Gayatri Mantra*. Jadunath Sarkar argues that he was not: see p. 206. This failure to provide a firm and unquestionable precedent for the *Kshatriya* status of elite Marathas meant that the issue was left wide open, to surface again and again in disputes between Brahmans and elite Marathas.

over Pratapsinh himself, were to be incorporated into a new non-Brahman account of Maharashtra's history.

The third aspect of regional culture is the category 'Maratha' itself. The problem is that we know very little about the attributes and values that were associated with the term as a status or an identity. We know that both elite families and the upwardly mobile were anxious to call themselves Marathas. However, we have very little idea about the precise meaning of such a claim to these families beyond its loose association with martial prowess and a *Kshatriya varna* status. Moreover, it is very difficult to ascertain how widely this, or any other, meaning of the term 'Maratha' was diffused throughout western Indian society. As we have seen, some western commentators certainly understood it to be a title possessing great symbolic power and capable of attracting immense popular loyalty. Most important of all for the present argument, we have almost no understanding of how, whether as elite status, or broader regional identity, the category 'Maratha' developed historically. It is very likely that the life and career of Shivaji helped to invest the term with some of its significance in associating it in popular culture with great military prowess. At the same time Shivaji's own quest for a recognition of the Rajput descent and the *Kshatriya varna* status of the Bhosale family points to the association, from that time at least, of the Maratha identity with *Kshatriya* status; and with at least a claim to a genealogical link with the old Rajput families of northern India. However, it is not clear whether a Maratha status already existed as an object of social aspiration, or was created only during the expansion of Maratha power under Shivaji. The emergence of powerful families such as the Holkars of Indore and the Shindes of Gwalior suggest further complexities in the term.[13] On the one hand, the exploits of these families undoubtedly contributed to the association of the Maratha identity with military heroism. On the other, neither family could, or tried, to assert a *Kshatriya* status or a genealogical linkage with the Rajput lineages.

The paucity of hard evidence about the historical development of the Maratha identity since the time of Shivaji makes it very difficult to answer these questions with certainty, or to attempt any larger description of these aspects of regional culture. In the analysis that follows, therefore, we will concentrate on the three specific aspects of

13 The Shinde and Holkar families were two of the most powerful independent rulers to emerge under the leadership of Shivaji's successors in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Each carved out sizeable territories in central India. The Shindes were originally from an obscure family from within the complex of peasant castes. The Holkars were *dhangars* or shepherds by caste.

social structure outlined above, and focus largely on their development from the end of the eighteenth century.

The Marathi *bakhars*

One source of information about the changing social significance of the term 'Maratha' before the onset of East India Company rule is in the Marathi *bakhar*. These are accounts of important episodes in the history of western India. Their real dates and authorship are often uncertain, but most of them can be dated from between 1700 and the early years of the nineteenth century.[14] Their most usual subjects were the lives of Maratha rulers, the fortunes of prominent families, the major battles fought by the Marathas, and the exploits of prominent Maratha leaders of the Shinde, Holkar, Gayakavad, and Bhosale families.

What is striking about the Marathi *bakhars* is that they use the term 'Maratha' infrequently, compared to the extraordinary prominence that the term was to achieve in the course of the nineteenth century, and the intense controversy that it was to provoke. This very strong contrast is one of the most obvious indicators of the fundamental change in the meaning and social significance of the term that was to take place under British rule. The *bakhars* use the term 'Maratha' in two different ways. The first is to denote, in collective fashion, all Marathi-speakers, both Brahmans and other castes. The second usage does make a slightly clearer distinction between Brahmans and those that are called Marathas – the small circles of elite families claiming a Maratha *Kshatriya* status.

The *Sabhasadachi bakhar* was probably the first of the histories written about the Shivaji period.[15] It is largely an account of the life of Shivaji, and does not often use the term 'Maratha'. Its only mention of Maratha social structure occurs during the description of Shivaji's coronation:

> It was thought that Shivaji ought to become the ruler of the Marathas, and that he should be honoured as a king. All the important people were summoned, and after consideration they agreed to this. Then the bhat Gosavis told him to sit on the throne. Concerning the king's lineage, it was determined that he was a pure Kshatriya, from a house of the Sisodes who had come down from the north. The bhats had previously decided that the thread ceremony should be

14 For further details of the *bakhars*, see R. V. Heravadakar, *Marathi bakhar*, Venus Prakashan, Pune 1957 (Marathi).

15 The *Sabhasadachi bakhar* was written fourteen years after Shivaji's death by Krshnaji Anant Sabhasad, at the request of Shivaji's son, Rajaram, and completed in 1697: A. R. Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, Pune 1969, p. 10.

performed in the same way as it was for the Kshatriyas of the north, and did for him the thread ceremony of a Kshatriya king.[16]

The *Bhausahebachi bakhar* was written at the end of the eighteenth century, and describes the period of Maratha campaigns in the ten years before the heavy Maratha defeat at the battle of Panipat in 1761. This *bakhar* used the term 'Maratha' slightly more frequently. It also made some distinction between Brahmans and other Marathi-speakers, and conveyed an idea of some of the qualities that were associated with the term. It referred specifically to the occupations of Marathas: 'The trade of the Marathas is guerilla warfare.'[17] It distinguished clearly between Brahmans and elite Marathas, referring to 'all the important Brahman and Maratha sardars, great and small'.[18] At the same time, it used the term 'Maratha' in a collective sense, to describe the Marathas as a military power: 'From this point the Maratha power grew, and from then the Marathas never flinched.'[19] The writer clearly felt that this tradition of military prowess formed an essential part of the culture of the Marathas as a whole; 'in this way, the ancient Marathi dharma was continued'.[20] Here, we get a sense of the meaning that was attached to the term when it was used in its loose collective sense to indicate all Marathi-speakers: to be a Maratha was to fight.

There is also a strong sense of this association in the *Chitnisi bakhar*. This was an account of the lives of Sambhaji and Rajaram, the sons of Shivaji, and was probably written in the second decade of the nineteenth century. The writer does not use the term 'Maratha' at all frequently but, when he does, it is in its collective sense, and with a clear consciousness of its association with skill and bravery in battle. He refers to 'the marvellous powers of the Marathi armies' and 'the Marathi forces'.[21] He describes, after one success in battle, 'the commendation of the Maratha sardars'.[22] It is clear that he means the term to include both Brahmans and Maratha families here. A *sardar* might be either a member of one of the elite Maratha houses, or of a Brahman family, such as the Patwardhans of Sangli or the Pant Sachiv of Bhor, on whom a title and estates had been conferred for their services to one of the Maratha rulers or their ministers.

16 S. N. Joshi (ed.), *Krshnaji Anant Sabhasad: the history of Chatrapati Raja Shivaji*, Pune 1960 (Marathi), p. 80.

17 Y. M. Pathan (ed.), *Bhausahebachi bakhar*, Sholapur 1959 (Marathi), p. 13. The identity of the author of this *bakhar* is not known.

18 ibid., p. 9. 19 ibid., p. 133. 20 ibid., p. 138.

21 R. V. Heravadakar (ed.), Malhar Ramarao Chitnis, *The History of Chatrapati Maharaja Sambhaji and the elder Maharaja Rajaram*, Pune 1972 (Marathi), pp. 31–2.

22 ibid., p. 55.

This section has focused on one of the three areas of regional culture that were to assume major importance during the nineteenth century: the status or category of 'Maratha'. The *bakhars* suggest that the term had a very different significance, at the time of writing, from that which it acquired later. There was certainly a clear association of the term with the skills of the soldier, and in this sense it seems to have been applied with no particular regard for caste. The term could also be used in a narrower and purely descriptive sense, to denote the Maratha families. This unselfconscious and flexible usage contrasts very strongly with the significance that the term was to acquire later in the century, as the central symbol of the 'traditions' of Maharashtra itself, which non-Brahmans and others strove to capture and imbue with their own meanings.

The disputes in Satara: *varna* status and political conflict

The years 1817 and 1818 saw the collapse of the East India Company's attempts to exert an overall political control over the heterogeneous assortment of Maratha warrior-rulers through the peshwa Bajirao II. After his defeat in 1818, Bajirao was deposed and exiled. Mountstuart Elphinstone's government decided that it would be politic to install Pratapsinh Bhosale, the nominal descendant of Shivaji Bhosale, as Chatrapati, in Satara. This would both remove a possible source of disaffection, and establish a figurehead for western India who was not a Brahman, thus, in theory, undercutting the claims to social leadership of the Chitpavan Brahman peshwa and his supporters. However, Pratapsinh's position was to be more one of symbolic importance than real power. His territories were narrowly restricted to those around Satara, and he was to hold no communication with any other power except through the East India Company's agents.

Pratapsinh's period of office, from 1818 to 1839, was to be of profound importance for all of the three areas of regional culture with which we are concerned: for movements of upward social mobility within the Maratha-*kunbi* complex of castes; for the employment of *varna* divisions in the conduct of political rivalries; and for changes in the significance of the category 'Maratha'. One of the main features of this period was a bitter and long-drawn-out dispute between the elite Maratha families of Satara, led by Pratapsinh, and the Chitpavan Brahmans of western Maharashtra. The main issue was whether the elite Maratha families were entitled to call themselves Maratha *Kshatriyas*, and to have texts from the Vedas for their religious ceremonies. The Brahman party denied that there were any true

Kshatriyas left in this, the *Kaliyug*, or most corrupt age of Hindu society. They based their case on two arguments: first, the Hindu *puranas* had told how Parashuram, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, had completely exterminated the whole of the *Kshatriya varna*; second, most of the elite Maratha families had manifestly lapsed from the religious rituals, social practices, and the strict genealogical purity that were proper to true *Kshatriyas*. Indeed, many of their habits resembled those of Muslims rather than twice-born Hindus. The Brahman party asserted as a consequence that there were no true intermediate *varnas* left in Hindu society between those of Brahman and *Shudra*. In the present age, only Brahmans, out of all the Hindus, were entitled to hear and use Vedic scriptures.

Against this, Pratapsinh's party claimed a Rajput descent for the elite Maratha families, a *Kshatriya* status and the rituals, containing sacred texts from the Vedas, that were the right of the twice-born. They rejected the less sacred texts drawn from the *puranas* that were deemed appropriate for *Shudras*. They argued that the rights of elite Marathas to the rituals of the twice-born had been persistently eroded since the gradual transfer of real power from the Maratha Chatrapatis to their ministers, the peshwas, during the eighteenth century. Despite the puranic stories concerning the extinction of the *Kshatriya varna*, there were good grounds for believing that since the time of Shivaji, the Bhosale and other elite Maratha families had always been granted Vedic rites, on the strength of their Rajput origins.

To a large extent, of course, this dispute recalls that over the *Kshatriya* status of Shivaji himself. However, much more clearly than in the case of Shivaji, this dispute formed an essential part of what was, in fact, a struggle for political power and authority between Pratapsinh and the Chitpavan Brahmans. Both parties were sharply aware of the fundamental change in the political relationship between Brahmans and elite Marathas that had been brought about by the East India Company's assumption of power, and its installation of a Maratha Chatrapati as a ruler in his own right. On Pratapsinh's side, both he and his family were bitterly aware of how the Maratha Chatrapatis before them had been rendered powerless by the peshwas, and Pratapsinh was determined that he should exercise power himself, and delegate none of it to a Brahman minister. These considerations were lent greater urgency by the very novelty, and hence the uncertainty, of East India Company power in the 1820s. There was no guarantee that it would last, and any withdrawal would leave the field open, with everything to play for. In the attempt, as he saw it, to recover his authority, and to present himself in the mantle of Shivaji refurbished, Pratapsinh had to win an

acknowledgement of his *Kshatriya* status. In projecting this new position, Pratapsinh also went beyond the issue of *varna* status, to make what was a very early statement in one of the most important ideological debates of the century. This debate focused squarely upon the very nature of Maharashtra's traditions; upon the role of different social groups in shaping them; and upon the significance and social application of the term 'Maratha' itself. Given his position, it was natural that Pratapsinh should set his claim to social leadership within a larger reinterpretation of Maharashtra's history. This depicted Maharashtra as a society shaped by a warrior and ruling elite of Maratha families; an elite whose rightful power had been usurped by the cunning of Brahman ministers, and whose heritage had been destroyed by the shameful defeat of Bajirao II. As in the case of Pratapsinh, groups of all different kinds were to find it useful to put forward their own historical interpretations for the purpose of conducting much more immediate political rivalries.

For the Chitpavan Brahmans in the dispute, matters were somewhat different. They were to be torn in two directions. On one side, it was possible that they might do very well in serving the East India Company as an administrative elite. Indeed, some of the key figures in the dispute were already, by 1818, prominent servants of the Company. On the other side, there was what they stood to lose before Pratapsinh's projection of himself as a new Shivaji. For the Brahmans, as much as for Pratapsinh, the possibility of a renewal in the real power and authority of the Maratha Chatrapatis forced into consciousness the wider issue of how their longer-term relations were to be perceived. The idea of a society led by a warrior and landowning elite appeared in retrospect to deny the contribution of Chitpavan Brahmans as the skilled administrators of the Marathas, and the ministers to whom the latter had turned when the quality of their own leadership had declined.

There was also a second kind of power that the Chitpavans in the dispute with Pratapsinh felt to be under attack. As Brahmans, they had some stake in maintaining the religious hierarchies of western Indian society. The peshwas had always assumed it as part of their role to enforce these hierarchies, and to act as the executors of Brahman religious authorities in matters of dispute over ritual and caste relations. As we shall see, it was soon obvious that the East India Company was not prepared to take on this role. In this way, a vital bulwark of social and religious discipline disappeared. Chitpavans feared that castes of all kinds would seize the opportunity to press claims to higher status that had been denied them under peshwa rule. Their fears were very soon confirmed.

It is in this context that we can best understand Pratapsinh's claims to *Kshatriya varna* status, and the immense opposition that he encountered from the Chitpavan party. The control of *varna* status was the means by which they attempted to deny credibility to Pratapsinh's idea of a society shaped by a warrior and landowning elite, and led by a Chatrapati with all the authority of a Hindu king. They emphasised instead the administrative dependence of the Marathas on their Brahman ministers, and their lack, as *Shudras*, of any but the authority of *de facto* power for their rule.

The history of relations between the peshwas and the Chatrapati of Satara helps in part to explain Pratapsinh's sense of grievance. The progressive loss of the real power of the Maratha Chatrapatis to their Brahman ministers culminated in the reduction of the Chatrapati almost to the position of a prisoner in the hands of the peshwa, held under restraint at the fort of Satara, after the death of Shahu I in 1749. Shahu II, the father of Pratapsinh, hoped that he might be allowed a more active political role than that of simply conferring the office of the peshwa-ship. However, the long reign of Nana Phadnis saw no improvement in the family's position, and there is evidence that this gave rise to considerable resentment and bitterness. Chatarsinh, brother of Shahu II and uncle of Pratapsinh, was especially bitter at the disunity amongst the Maratha powers, and dreamed of reuniting them into an effective force against the British.

Shahu II died in May 1808, and was succeeded by Pratapsinh. His mother, Maisaheb, and Chatarsinh were hostile to the last peshwa Bajirao II's acceptance of British help, and looked around for ways to save some independent authority for the Maratha powers. Chatarsinh and his military contingent went to Raghuji Bhosale of Nagpur, Yashavantrao Holkar, and to the Courts at Jodhpur, Udepur, and Baroda, in the attempt to organise a Maratha force against the British. Chatarsinh was eventually taken and imprisoned by Bajirao's servant, Trimbakji Dengle, in February 1811.[23] When Bajirao's relations with the British deteriorated to the point of open war, he removed Pratapsinh and his family from Satara to the more isolated fort of Vasota, and took the whole family with him in his running fight with British forces. The Chatrapati fell into British hands after the battle of Ashta in February 1818. In April of the same year, the Bombay government installed Pratapsinh as Chatrapati, with James Grant, the historian, as Resident, with responsibility for training Pratapsinh in public administration; and Elphinstone's confidential agent, Balajipant Natu,

23 G. S. Sardesai, *A New History of the Marathas*, Phoenix Publications, Bombay 1968, vol. III, pp. 503–5.

as his assistant.[24] The Bombay government's aim in setting up a small state of Satara ruled by the Raja was, as Elphinstone described, 'to afford an honourable maintenance to the representative of the ancient princes of this country, and to establish among the Mahrattas a counter-poise to the remaining influence of the former Bramin government'.[25] In September 1819, a formal treaty between Pratapsinh and the British was signed, defining and limiting the former's territorial jurisdiction.

At a very early stage, however, Pratapsinh showed a strong desire to assert his authority as Chatrapati. John Briggs, Grant's successor as Resident at Satara in 1823, urged that 'means should be taken to disabuse his mind of the exaggerated pretensions to supremacy over all Mahrattas, encouraged by his mother and other relations'.[26] He reported that

> the Rajah's weak point was an exaggerated notion of his hereditary dignity and consequence, and of his rightful claims as representative head of the Mahratta empire in its brief period of triumph. He gloried in the titles of 'Maharajah Chuttraputtee' and 'Hindooput', and always alluded to the Peishwas, especially the last, Bajee Rao, as unfaithful servants of his house, who had abused his confidence, and all of whose acts, their treaties as well as their wars with the Honourable Company, were unauthorised by the legitimate sovereign, and therefore politically of no effect.[27]

Briggs's last point indicates another aspect of Pratapsinh's attitudes that was to be significant in the disputes of the 1820s and 1830s: his resentment of Brahmans, and especially of the Chitpavan peshwas. Elphinstone described how Pratapsinh

> was free from most of the ordinary prejudices of his countrymen, and not having been instructed in Brahmanical lore, had little respect either for the religious doctrines and ceremonies of the Brahmins, or for their cosmogony and science, 'falsely so called'. He was extremely desirous of educating all the Mahrattas, so that they might be able to break up the Brahmins' monopoly of office, for which purpose he established a school within his Palace to which he invited the attendance of all the sons of his Mahratta chiefs and high officers.[28]

24 Balajipant Natu, a Chitpavan Brahman of the powerful Natu family in Pune, had served the Raste family before becoming Elphinstone's agent, and typified the generation of administratively or professionally skilled servants of the old regime who were able to use their skills to serve the British. See K. A. Ballhatchet, *Social Policy and Social Change in western India, 1817–1830*, Oxford University Press 1957, pp. 93–4.

25 M. Elphinstone to J. Grant, 8 April 1818, quoted in R. D. Choksey, *The Aftermath 1818–1826*, Bombay 1950, p. 255.

26 Quoted in Evans Bell, *Memoir of General John Briggs of the Madras Army*, London 1885, p. 91. 27 ibid., pp. 94–5. 28 ibid., p. 91.

Briggs observed much the same hostility: 'Against the Brahmins, as the tribe to which the Peishwas belonged, this unfortunate prince, though he could not help employing a good many of them, entertained an invincible prejudice, amounting almost to hatred.'[29]

This dislike broke out into an open quarrel between Pratapsinh and Balajipant Natu, Grant's assistant. One source of Pratapsinh's dislike may have been that Grant employed Natu to persuade him of the necessity of a dramatic reduction in his personal spending.[30] However, the hostility also seemed to derive from Pratapsinh's fear that Natu, as Grant's native agent, might take too much power into his own hands; and from Natu's concern with his position as full power was made over to Pratapsinh. In October 1819, after Grant had been watching Natu for evidence of his abusing his authority, Natu approached him and complained that

> he could no longer stay in Satara or ever look on the Raja's face, that he had told several respectable persons that Grant Sahib had mentioned to him that Ballajee Pant was taking bribes, that he was taking everything into his hands like Bhow Maunkaiser, but that he was now Raja & should take care to prevent him.[31]

Briggs described how:

> When Captain Grant, just before his own retirement, placed the Rajah in power, Balajee Punt Natoo fully expected to have been made Dewan or minister, but the Rajah dreaded a second Peishwa supported by British authority, and had, moreover, an aversion for the man.[32]

Natu insisted on leaving Satara at Pratapsinh's attainment of full powers, and Grant described his own inability to persuade him to stay: 'Although he will be a great loss to me I cannot allow him to take the power into his hands which I am bound to deliver over to the Raja.'[33] Natu offered to stay as Grant's servant rather than the Raja's, but when Grant informed him that his duties would be limited to telling him of anything improper in the Raja's administration, Natu rejected the position as little better than that of a *karkun* or common clerk.[34] Pratapsinh and his mother, Grant reported, were 'half mad with joy at his departure'.[35]

There is also some evidence of hostility to the administrative

29 ibid., p. 93.
30 Ballhatchet, *Social Policy and Social Change in western India, 1817–1830*, pp. 21–2 and 230
31 J. Grant to M. Elphinstone, 11 July 1819, quoted in Ballhatchet, ibid., p. 235.
32 Evans Bell, *General John Briggs*, pp. 94–5.
33 Grant to Elphinstone, 22 October 1819, quoted in Ballhatchet, *Social Policy and Social Change in western India, 1817–1830*, p. 236.
34 ibid. 35 ibid.

arrangements at Satara, in particular to Pratapsinh's position of tutelage under James Grant, among the Raja's staff. Grant reported two incidents of this kind to Elphinstone. The first occurred when Grant reproached the Raja for having interfered with the proceedings of a court of law, at which a member of his staff, Dajiba Upadhyaya, taunted Pratapsinh with his having to take orders constantly from the British.[36] The second incident occurred in 1822, after power had been transferred to Pratapsinh, when a cat, firmly bound up, was sent to him, addressed to the 'Maharaja Chatrapati' as 'an order from one of the Sahib log to try this prisoner in his Udalat for having killed one of his fowls'. Grant suspected that the sender was Chintamanrao Patwardhan, the Brahman *jagirdar* of Sangli.[37]

British policy, and the British administrators in Satara, were in part responsible for the formation of Pratapsinh's attitudes, both to his own office, and to the Brahman peshwas and their fellow-castemen in Satara. First, there was the deliberate evocation of the postion of Shivaji as the legitimate head of the combined Maratha powers in the reinstatement of Pratapsinh as Chatrapati, by which the Bombay government hoped to draw Maratha loyalties away from the last peshwa. Briggs himself realised that Pratapsinh's sense of his importance as Chatrapati could have been raised in this way, and that this may have had something to do with his later sense of grievance at the limitation of his jurisdiction by the treaty of 1819:

> Before the Rajah and his family fell into our hands, on the capture of Sattara by our troops, Mr Elphinstone ordered the British flag, which was at first hoisted, to be hauled down, and the flag of the Rajah displayed, and by proclamation, and in other forms intended to attract and conciliate the Mahratta chiefs, implied that the claims to federal supremacy of the Rajah of Sattara were more legitimate than those of the usurping Peishwa, whom we denounced and proscribed. There was never, of course, any intention or promise of restoring the extended sovereignty of Sivajee's house, but there was quite enough advantage taken of its old headship for our political purposes at the time to give the Rajah and his personal adherents an uneasy feeling that his full rights had been unduly cut down by the treaty.[38]

Besides this deliberate revival of the image of a dominant Chatrapati, British policy almost certainly increased Pratapsinh's sense of resentment at the treatment of his family by the peshwas. The Bombay government's view, often repeated, was that the peshwas had usurped the proper authority of the Maratha Chatrapatis. British administrators in Satara also rapidly developed a set of stereotypes about the relations between Brahmans and Marathas, which increased Pratapsinh's suspi-

36 ibid., pp. 239–40. 37 ibid., p. 240 38 Evans Bell, *General John Briggs*, p. 98.

cion of the Brahmans in his own administration. Grant described what he felt to be the common attitude to Marathas amongst the Brahmans of Satara in a letter to Elphinstone:

> They look upon Mahrattas as little better than monkies in regard to their ever becoming men of business, and the few Mahrattas who have ability in this respect are adduced by them merely as singular instances in their species. Generally speaking even amongst the more intelligent and sensible Bramins they offer their real opinion when praising the wisdom and discernment shown by Shahaji the 4th. Rajah in delegating the power of the sovereign to the Peishwas as the only means of repairing an empire which he forsaw would have speedily fallen to pieces in the hands of his posterity.[39]

The British emphasis on the administrative ambitions of Brahmans and their contempt for the ability of Marathas almost certainly increased Pratapsinh's suspicion of the Brahmans in his own administration.

It is also very likely that as first Resident in Satara and guardian of the young Pratapsinh, James Grant (later known as James Grant Duff), in his role as the historian of the Marathas, influenced the young Chatrapati. It was during his years in Satara between 1818 and 1823 that Grant gathered the materials for his *History of the Mahrattas*, with its emphasis on the glorious exploits of Shivaji in the foundation of an independent Maratha state, and its gradual decline and dissolution in the second half of the eighteenth century under the leadership of the peshwas.[40] After the publication of James Grant Duff's work in 1826, Pratapsinh clearly felt that the work should be read widely amongst the Marathas themselves, and had the book translated into Marathi, although the translation was never printed.[41]

With Pratapsinh's pride in his position, however nominal, as the Chatrapati of all the Marathas; his hostility to the old regime and suspicion of what he regarded as Brahman attempts to revive it; and the evidence of a clash between Pratapsinh and Balajipant Natu; together with more general dissatisfaction amongst Pratapsinh's staff, the stage

39 J. Grant to M. Elphinstone, 23 March 1819, quoted in R. D. Choksey, *The Aftermath 1818–1826*, p. 266.

40 See the introduction by S. M. Edwardes to James Grant Duff, *A History of the Mahrattas*, Oxford University Press 1921, vol. I, pp. xxxiv–xlii for details about Grant Duff's collection of source materials for his history.

41 D. B. Parasnis recorded that: 'Maharaja Pratapsing took such keen interest in this work that he had various bakhars and narratives specially written for Grant Duff's assistance, and after the publication of the *History of the Mahrattas* by Grant Duff, he got it translated into Marathi': Parasnis, 'Maratha Historical Literature', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. XXII, 1908, p. 171. The first Marathi translation appeared in 1830, prepared by Captain David Capon: see A. R. Kulkarni, *James Cuninghame Grant Duff*, Pune 1969 (Marathi), p. 203.

was set for the conflict over the *varna* status of the Bhosales and other elite Maratha families.[42]

In an account of the dispute written by M. G. Dongare, hostilities between the elite Maratha families of Satara and the Brahman party began around 1820. Between 1820 and 1828 the Brahman party, led by Balajipant Natu, Chintamanrao Patwardhan, and another Chitpavan Brahman from Sangli named Nilakanthashastri Thatthe, campaigned to limit the authority for Vedic ritual to Brahmans alone.[43]

They preprared new religious texts to support their claims, and brought the Shankaracharaya of Karvir *math*, a leading authority on religious law, to Pune and persuaded him to support their interpretations of the traditional histories affecting this issue. They also prepared letters and lists describing their case, endorsed by the Shankaracharaya, and sent them to religious centres all over India. The three Brahman protagonists argued in particular that the most prominent rulers of the Bhosale house, Shivaji, Sambhaji, and Shahu, had never been true *Kshatriya*, and had never received proper Vedic rites.[44] This last claim struck at the heart of Pratapsinh's interpretation of his postion as Chatrapati, in that it both denied him the *Kshatriya* status essential to the validity of his title, and undermined the standing of Shivaji himself as a true Chatrapati, entitled to the obedience of all Marathas, upon which Pratapsinh's own view of his position was based.

Pratapsinh's party meanwhile was active. In 1819–20, emissaries were given a letter from Grant Duff and sent to Udepur to obtain information about the usages of the *Kshatriya* castes of Rajputana, and to ask how information might be found about the genealogical connection between the houses of Udepur and Satara, upon which the Bhosale claim to *Kshatriya* status had been founded at the time of Shivaji. The emissaries informed Pratapsinh that Ranaji, the Maharaja of Udepur, had been unable to give them any detailed information, but confirmed

42 I have taken my material for this dispute from the diaries of Pratapsinh, which have been published as part of the *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar*, and from an account of the affair written much later, in 1905, from the perspective of the controversy over ritual then current in Kolhapur, by Mahadev Ganesh Dongare. Dongare was a Prabhu, active in the non-Brahman movement in Kolhapur: see Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, Bombay 1976, p. 128. I have therefore used Dongare's account with caution, balancing it against the material used in the diaries.

43 Nilakanthashastri Thatthe, leader of the Hindu orthodox in Pune, was one of the eminent Brahman religious scholars who was given a salary by the Bombay government, and later employed to advise on judicial procedures in Satara. Ballhatchet, *Social Policy and Social Change in western India, 1817–1830*, pp. 87 and 107.

44 M. G. Dongare, *The lineage of the Bhosale family*, Kolhapur 1905 (Marathi), p. 3. A copy of this work is in the Jayakar Library, University of Pune.

that the Satara family was of the house of the Sisodes of Udepur.[45] In 1822–3, Pratapsinh was visited by one Dipavijay Kaviraj from Udepur, at his own request, and Pratapsinh pressed him for information about his distant ancestors. Kaviraj gave him details about the princely families of Udepur, Satara, Annagondi, Kolhapur, Tanjore, Nagpur, Chittigava, Deulgava, and Akalkot.[46] Captain E. W. West, the assistant political agent at Kolhapur, also mentions having seen a letter from Pratapsinh to the Governor of Bombay, asking him to procure from Udepur the details of Rajput rites and ceremonies, as he was himself a Rajput and a *Kshatriya*.[47]

Pratapsinh was not alone in defending the cause of elite Maratha families against the Brahman initiative from Sangli and Pune. On 27 July 1828, Dongare tells us, the Kshatriya Maratha Mandal held a meeting and raised a petition to the Bombay government against the activities of the Brahman party, pointing out that they had circulated seventy-five major religious centres throughout India and deliberately misled people about the existence of the *Kshatriya varna* in contemporary India, and the religious rites of the Marathas, and asked that these papers should be sent back or destroyed.[48] Pratapsinh himself also had a stake in the admission of the *Kshatriya* status of elite families other than the Bhosales, since it was with these that the Bhosales interdined and intermarried.

The whole dispute reached a climax in 1830, when it was decided to hold a public debate to resolve the issue in the Sanskrit school at Satara. Each side appointed a team of learned pandits and the debate went on for several days, each side giving evidence for its cause. On the final day, Brahmans from all over the Deccan and southern Maharashtra came to Satara to hear the verdict. The atmosphere was so tense that Pratapsinh feared for the safety of the pandits, and came himself wearing a sword to protect them. The verdict of the debate was to confirm the Maratha case.

Amongst the main points of the debate described by Dongare, the following are the most striking:

1 Even though Parashuram tried twenty-one times to remove all Kshatriyas from the earth, still they have never been wiped out.
2 The Kshatriyas that Parashuram failed to kill have never forsaken their Vedic karma.

45 ibid., pp. 22–3. 46 ibid., p. 23.
47 E. W. West, 'Are the Marathas Kshatriyas or Sudras?' *Indian Antiquary*, vol. 3, April 1874, p. 109.
48 Dongare, *The lineage of the Bhosale family*, p. 3.

3 It is a fabrication to say that because all male Kshatriyas were wiped out at the time of Parashuram, their women resorted to Brahmans to beget children, thus breaking down the caste.
4 There cannot be a shortage of Kshatriyas today because two kings had sprung from the Soma and Suraya lines and found refuge in Badrikashram.
5 In the kaliyug, caste is not decided by usage alone.
6 There is no objection to Kshatriyas who eat meat performing Vedic rituals.
7 Even though, in this yuga, Kshatriyas have eaten the food of Shudras, there is no difficulty regarding Vedic ritual.
8 Even though the proper rites are omitted in some Kshatriya households, still their Vedic karma is unimpaired.
9 It is not the case that the king alone, on account of the Vedic mantras at his coronation, has rights to Vedic ritual; all Kshatriyas have these rights.
10 The houses of Satara, Tanjore, Nagpur, and Karvir have the same common origin, and their rites are drawn from the Rgveda.
11 Kshatriyas beyond the Narmada river have rites from the Yajurveda. This is the case in Udepur. The Raja of Satara should therefore adopt the same rites himself.
12 Even though Kshatriyas are accustomed to eating from a single dish amongst their own caste fellows, still this does not disqualify them from Vedic rituals.
13 Even though the surnames of Kshatriyas and Shudras are identical, still there are ways of telling them apart.[49]

The first two stages of the Maratha argument were the use of interpretations of puranic mythology to prove the existence of a *Kshatriya varna*, and the assertion of a genealogical connection between elite Marathas and the Rajput families of northern India whose *Kshatriya* status was more clearly established. This was a replication of the kinds of argument that surrounded the coronation of Shivaji; and, like Shivaji, Pratapsinh's success in asserting his position as a true Chatrapati, entitled in principle if not in fact to the obedience of all Hindus in Maharashtra, depended on his ability to manipulate the religious sanctions, especially the proof of *varna* status, through which the conferment of the title was controlled.

What is also striking about these points is the very evident consciousness of the deviation among elite Maratha families from the ritual and practice appropriate to *Kshatriyas*. The points here were designed to cover deviations, from the omission of ritual, or the consumption of improper food, to the adoption of the Muslim practice of eating from a single dish, from exploitation by their opponents. The Maratha party

49 ibid., pp. 28–30. Some of the practices mentioned by Dongare as having been taken up by the elite Maratha families are clearly the product of Muslim influence, such as that of eating from a single dish amongst caste-fellows.

were also well aware that the division between themselves and the larger complex of Maharashtra's peasant castes was a very flexible one, and that the genealogies by which elite families distinguished themselves were frequently rewritten to accommodate new claimants to a Maratha status. This awareness was reflected in the last point, and perhaps significantly Dongare does not give any details of how the distinction was to be made. The ninth point reflects the influence of elite families other than the Bhosales, anxious that their own case should not depend entirely on the prescriptive right established at the time of Shivaji, although again we are given no details of how else their rights were to be established.

In 1836 Pratapsinh decided to arrange a ceremony of coronation for himself, to be modelled exactly on that of Shivaji. Significantly, there was great difficulty in ascertaining the exact form of the words and ceremonies that had been used for Shivaji, and Pratapsinh had to appoint a team of learned Shastris to prepare a ceremony for him, which was carried out in great state in the same year.[50]

The information about the disputes in these crucial two decades, given in Pratapsinh's diaries, confirms Dongare's evidence of a long-standing preoccupation with a Rajput descent; *Kshatriya* status and Vedic ritual; plus a renewed surge of interest in these symbols of the traditional political authority of the Bhosale family, coupled with a new campaign by orthodox Brahmans in the Deccan against the admission of any but Brahmans to Vedic ritual. The diaries give details of Pratapsinh's exchanges with the Rajput family of Udepur. Pratapsinh managed to arrange the marriage of his daughter with a relative of the Udepur family, and he recorded his pleasure at the acceptance of the robes of honour that he had sent to Udepur at the marriage, signifying the connection between the two families.[51] Another entry showed his gratification at the conventions of the Kachhva family of northern India, who were acknowledged as *Kshatriya*, and who would accept marriage connections only with the ruling families of Satara and Udepur.[52]

The diary recorded Pratapsinh's anxiety that the Bhosales should have the same ritual practices as the Udepur Rajputs. Part of the same conversation reveals another aspect of the political dimension of ritual, as a reflection of the immediate political relations between the Bhosale family and the Brahman priests of the court. Pratapsinh's assertion of

50 ibid. pp. 33–4.
51 G. S. Sardesai (ed.), *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar: Papers Referring to Pratapsinh, Raja of Satara*, Government Central Press, Bombay 1934, vol. 42, p. 87.
52 ibid., pp. 85–6.

his position as a true Chatrapati was not only a symbolic gesture of defiance to the Brahmans, whom he felt had appropriated the power that belonged to the Bhosales, but also had implications for very concrete issues like the employment and dismissal of palace priests; the relationships between different Brahman factions at the court; and ultimately the very mechanisms whereby internal caste discipline was maintained. It was as much with issues like these, as over the symbolism of Pratapsinh's campaign, that Brahmans like Balajipant Natu were concerned. In the interchange recorded here, Pratapsinh's *de facto* power to appoint and dismiss priests was balanced against his extraordinary dependence on the Brahman priest for the most basic explanation of what ritual would be appropriate for the Bhosale family. The Brahman, Valimbe, clearly regarded ritual as a matter of negotiation, bearing upon his relationship with the Chatrapati and his fellow Brahmans:

> The Bhatji said that the matter of Vedic ritual had been decided. Rites from the Yajurveda are those proper to Kshatriyas, and those are the custom in Udepur, and should therefore be in use amongst our caste in Satara. He said that we do rituals from the Rgveda here, but that if we are to do it in Satara as in Udepur, they should send us the texts and we will do them for you. The Bhatji was trying very hard to ingratiate himself with me, and said that he would do whatever had to be done, and perform a penance for it afterwards if he had to. All this is really just a device to get the texts sent, although we can only do these rites if a place for them is fixed. As long as we are all right I will be pleased. The real thing is to get the proper shastric texts.[53]

Pratapsinh made persistent attempts to use British Residents to obtain the religious texts appropriate to *Kshatriyas* from Udepur, which called forth the following rather exasperated note from the secretary to the Governor of Bombay to the Resident at Satara:

> The Honourable the Governor requests that you will inform His Highness that every effort has been made to obtain the works so anxiously wished for by him, but having hitherto proved ineffectual, he cannot anticipate any good from the frequent repetition of the applications already made on this subject.[54]

It seems obvious that Pratapsinh's initiatives, and the activities of the Kshatriya Maratha Mandal, represented a surge of interest in the social status of elite Maratha families, and a set of claims to *Kshatriya* status, Vedic ritual, and social intercourse with prominent princely families in other parts of India. These were, if not unprecedented, certainly new in terms of recent Maratha history. Pratapsinh's lack of much of the most basic information about his family's descent, and of the rituals proper

53 ibid., pp. 87–8.
54 Secretary to the Governor of Bombay to the Resident at Satara, no. 41 of 17 September 1928, *Bombay Political Consultations*.

to its status, suggest the novelty of his claims. The defeat of Bajirao II and the British decision to restore the descendant of Shivaji to the *gadi* at Satara, with all due honours, almost certainly acted as a stimulus for the revival of Maratha consciousness of their past social and political pre-eminence, and made it possible for families like the Bhosales to advance new claims. But what was most significant about the dispute was the interdependence of claims to ritual status, and Pratapsinh's more deliberately political assertion of what he saw as his restored authority over all Hindus, against the usurpers of that authority and their caste-fellows, the Chitpavan Brahmans of Satara and Pune.

With their central location in Satara; their focus on issues of social status and religious convention; their culmination in the very widely publicised debate of 1830; with the daring of Pratapsinh in assuming control of the appointment of palace priests, and his spectacular coronation in the manner of Shivaji in 1837, the events of these two decades almost certainly made a deep impression at many different levels of local society. The dispute affected not only those directly involved in it, but had implications for the much larger range of social groups at lower levels of the Maratha-*kunbi* complex, who might eventually advance the same claims. This brings us again to one of the other areas of popular culture with which we are concerned in this chapter: the creation in the early nineteenth century, if not before, of a well-defined process of upward mobility within the Maratha-*kunbi* group of castes. The initiatives of the Satara Marathas almost certainly facilitated this sort of mobility. The social pre-eminence of elite families within local society was, of course, very clear cut; and the boundaries of social intercourse for families such as the Bhosales were laid down distinctly. However, the line between acknowledged *assal* families, and those with obviously *kunbi* origins, was much less clearly drawn in matters of ritual practice and religious usage. This emerges very strongly from the points made at the 1830 debate. These seem intended mainly to prove that elite families had not forfeited their right to *Kshatriya* status, despite their widespread adoption of religious and domestic practices that were either an obvious product of Muslim influence, or which belonged in strict religious terms to *Shudras*. When, as in 1830, the issue was forced over the criteria for *Kshatriya* status, this flexibility of ritual practice made it necessary to have a series of definitions that would accommodate a very much wider range of groups than would, in practice, have been admitted to social intercourse with elite families. The criteria laid down in 1830 would have prevented almost no respectable *kunbi* family from putting forward claims to *Kshatriya* status.

All this seems confirmed when we turn back to Pratapsinh's diaries, where he frequently recorded his anxiety and irritation at the efforts of humble *kunbi* families to connect themselves with *assal* families. He made it clear that the 1820s and 1830s had seen a very worrying increase in such threats to their purity. The diaries also point to some of the effects of the British presence upon the structure of caste in this area of western Indian society, and suggest that this may have been to promote the kind of social mobility under discussion by weakening the authority of the traditional heads of caste, such as Pratapsinh himself.

Pratapsinh recorded with satisfaction the account given by a representative of the *Kshatriya* Kachhva family of northern India of their valuation of the different Maratha and Rajput families:

> Whenever men from our house go anywhere on service, we do not actually put our hands to the ground to salute any but these three: the Raja of Satara, Ranaji of Udepur, and the Kachhva Raja. This even an order in our house. I am in the service of the Gayakavad, but they are only kunbis, so I say 'Ram, Ram' when I greet them, and I do not make a proper respectful salutation.

However, the Kachhva man continued, these distinctions often came under attack:

> Even though those people have given us lakhs of rupees, still we will not make marriage connections with them. They have asked us for our daughter in marriage, and the matter has even come to blows. Daulatrao Shinde asked the Kachhva family of Rampur for their daughter and at this the Kachhvas were angry, and they quarrelled for five years, and Shinde even took some provinces from him, but he would not give him his daughter.[55]

More recently, the Gayakavad family of Baroda had made determined efforts to associate themselves with elite families, which Pratapsinh discussed in a long entry in his diary:

> I discussed with the Resident the acts of treachery that the Gayakavad has committed upon the Maratha caste in leading certain people astray by offering them a reward for contracting marriage alliances. The Gayakavad is a kunbi; he has led the people of our caste into wrong, and polluted the caste. He holds authority in his own caste, and has no reason to force himself into our caste.

This was no isolated incident, and posed the greatest threat to the proper social hierarchies:

> These days, when the kunbis and others grow wealthy, they try to pollute our caste. If this goes on, dharma itself will not remain. Each man should stick to his own caste, but in spite of this these men are trying to spread money around in our caste. But make no mistake, all Kshatriyas will look to protect their caste in this matter.

55 G. S. Sardesai (ed.), *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar: Papers Referring to Pratapsinh, Raja of Satara*, pp. 85–6.

The Gayakavad had clearly had some success with his financial inducements, and Pratapsinh related how he had had to throw many individuals out of caste:

> The Gayakavad of Baroda, as a mere kunbi, has offered some people of the Maratha caste the inducement of money and led them into betrayal and pollution. So the whole community of the Marathas gathered together and it was found that Chimnappa Sirke Kutrekar was responsible, so I said to him, you are no longer in our caste. Today, you must leave Satara. Thus, he was thrown out of the caste. The son of Appajirao Mohite had also gone over, so I told him he also was out of caste.[56]

Pratapsinh followed this with a long list of others punished for the same offence, and explained how he had also stopped their allowances where the offenders were employed by the Satara government.

He also complained of the breakdown of caste authority that had occurred since the introduction of British rule:

> Under the rule of Bajirao, there was a quarrel between the Sirkes and Mahadiks, and we ourselves settled it within our own castes by ourselves. Today, however, the English government refuse to take any part in caste discipline at all. These people have become very wealthy, and so they do this.

Pratapsinh even urged the British Resident at Satara that 'the government of the Company should prohibit this, both within its own and within this country's boundaries, and this would be to the credit of the Company',[57] and sent the Resident a long memorandum about the proper rules of social intercourse between the different families.

This refusal of the British government to take the same active role in the maintenance of caste discipline that had been assumed by the government of the peshwas may also have stimulated this kind of social mobility. Hiroshi Fukazawa has described how

> so far as the eighteenth century Maratha kingdom was concerned, the state played a vital role in the caste matters of the subjects, from the forfeiture and restoration of the caste status of individuals to the division of caste, the formulation of caste codes and the stabilisation of caste distinctions.[58]

For the period immediately after the assumption of rule by the East India Company, N. K. Wagle has described how the Bombay government literally abdicated all responsibility for enforcing the decisions of religious leaders concerning caste and ritual proprieties, a responsibility that the government of the peshwas had taken very seriously.[59] This

56 ibid., pp. 65–6. 57 ibid., p. 66.

58 Hiroshi Fukazawa, 'State and Caste System (Jati) in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom', *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, vol. 9, no. 1, June 1968.

59 N. K. Wagle, *Images of Maharashtra: A Regional Profile of India*, Curzon Press London 1980, pp. 135–41.

relaxation of caste discipline almost certainly extended to the Maratha-*kunbi* complex of castes, helping to stimulate claims to *Kshatriya* status amongst a wider circle of peasant families.

It is also worth noting here that, as the Chitpavan party had feared, claims to higher status did become widespread among a whole variety of groups in the 1820s. N. K. Wagle has described, for example, how sub-castes amongst the Sonars and Prabhus mounted a major campaign to claim *Kshatriya* status and Vedic ritual, from 1822. Leading the orthodox party were again Balajipant Natu, Chintamanrao Patwardhan and Nilakanthashastri Thatthe.[60]

We return now to the three areas of regional culture and social structure with which we are concerned to ask what we can learn about them from the evidence of these disputes. First, it seems clear that a movement of upward mobility within the Maratha-*kunbi* complex of castes was under way at the turn of the eighteenth century. Moreover, we have argued that the campaign of the elite Marathas was such as to give a further impulse to claims to Maratha *Kshatriya* status, and to spread these claims to a wider range of peasant castes. The East India Company policy of refusing to enforce caste discipline was likely to contribute to this process. Second, the manipulation of ritual status became an important weapon in the rivalry between elite Marathas and Chitpavan Brahmans. Lastly, there is the question of the implications of the dispute for the category 'Maratha' itself. Once again, it is noteworthy that the term was not particularly prominent in the actual rhetoric of the dispute. It does not appear at all in the list of points put out by the Maratha families, in which they appear exclusively concerned with their ritual status. However, this does not mean that the disputes were without significance for the term 'Maratha'. Their significance appears rather when two other processes are taken into consideration. First, encouraging a wider range of peasant families to claim the status of Maratha *Kshatriyas*, the disputes helped to give the term 'Maratha' a broader popularity throughout the caste complex. They helped to give a new significance to the term, in addition to its older reference to all Marathi-speakers, and to the small circles of elite families. 'Maratha' became an identity, whose attributes were of rulership and martial heroism, that could be shared by very large groups within the Maratha-*kunbi* caste complex, as distinct from Brahmans or other castes. As we shall see in the next section, there is considerable evidence from the 1860s of such claims to a Maratha *Kshatriya* identity being made throughout the caste complex.

60 ibid., pp. 129–59.

These aspirations had, historically, a tradition of tension with Brahman opinion. The disputes at Satara provided a fresh reminder of that tension. This brings us to the second process that was to affect the category of 'Maratha': the projection of new interpretations of Maharashtra's history and her social leadership, such as were made by Pratapsinh. Such rival interpretations were to proliferate later in the century, and in the debates that followed, the category of 'Maratha' itself was to become one of the symbols of Maharashtra's traditions, to which different groups attempted to give their own meanings. In this way the disputes, the hostility between Brahmans and Marathas, and the wider extension of the Maratha-*Kshatriya* identity in the caste complex, opened the way for the term 'Maratha' to develop a new significance. It became an identity that was applied in practice to the whole Maratha-*kunbi* grouping, to the specific exclusion of Brahmans. As we shall see at the end of this chapter, the clearest evidence for this new application can be seen in the Census Reports for the Bombay Presidency: by 1901, the numbers of those claiming a Maratha status of some kind far exceeded those returning themselves simply as *kunbis*. It was this emerging identity, with its overtones of conflict with Brahman religious opinion, that non-Brahmans from the 1870s seized upon, and sought to push in much more radical and overtly anti-Brahman directions.

Social structure and the Maratha identity in the 1860s

Many observers of western Indian society in the 1860s noticed that the process of upward social mobility within the Maratha-*kunbi* caste grouping was growing in strength. In their accounts, the term 'Maratha' also occurs much more frequently, and there seems a growing realisation that the term could be interpreted in different ways, and that particular interpretations were of significance for broader political allegiances. This section will examine two accounts of Maratha social structure written during the 1860s from very different political perspectives, and whose interpretations differ very markedly.

The first account is in the *Marathi Dnyan Prasarak* newspaper, published in September 1865, and is entitled 'The different divisions of caste among the people of Maharashtra'. It is not clear who the writer was, but his account of the overall structure of society forms a strong contrast to that of the protagonists of the Maratha cause in Satara and, implicitly, to that of all those who had since claimed a Maratha *Kshatriya* status: 'If you look at the living conditions, the eating habits and the occupations of the Maratha people, it is very clear that they fall

into two distinct groups: one superior varna, that of the Brahmans, and one inferior one, that of the Shudras.' The writer described the origins of the Maratha-*kunbi* complex of castes, and explained how it had assumed its present form. He allowed that a very small number of families, such as that of Shivaji Bhosale, might claim a *Kshatriya* status, since the Bhosales had proved their Rajput origins. However, this narrow circle of families had not managed to maintain their purity: 'After some time, people of other castes began to infiltrate the Maratha houses. Some kunbi families of a very low sort made their fortunes and acquired great power. Because these had become very rich, some Maratha families were prepared to form marriage connections with them.' The writer described, with obvious distaste for these 'parvenu' *kunbi* families, the more recent history of the caste:

> In the time of the peshwas, some people from very low and insignificant families raised themselves to high office, and the rot set in from there. Tukoji Holkar was a shepherd by caste, and Ranaji Shinde and Damaji Gayakavad were of very inferior birth, but when they became rulers in their own right, their reputation was very attractive, and the pure Marathas began to form marriage connections with them.

This had produced the caste that were now known as Marathas: 'Thus, the Kshatriya Rajputs and the Shudras were mixed together, and this has produced the Maratha caste.'[61] The consequence of this intermixture, the writer made it clear, was that no one styling himself as a Maratha in the present day could claim anything but a *Shudra varna* position.

An account of social structure that contrasts very strongly with this is contained in a Marathi work entitled *Jatibhed Vivekasar*, 'A critique of caste divisions'. This was written by Tukaram Tatya Padaval, and first published in 1861. Padaval (1838–98) was a Bhandari by caste, born and brought up in Bombay, and developed close personal and business connections with the circle of lower-caste radicals in Pune that included Jotirao Phule. 'A critique of caste divisions' is the first published Marathi work, as far as I am aware, to be written opposing the religious hierarchies of Hinduism, from a self-consciously lower caste perspective. In spite of the book's obvious partisanship, it does contain very valuable information about perceptions of *varna* status in the Maratha-*kunbi* caste grouping, and very largely confirms the information given in the *Marathi Dnyan Prasarak* article, despite the very different bias of the latter piece.[62]

61 *Marathi Dnyan Prasarak*, September 1865 (Marathi), pp. 280–2.

62 Jotirao Phule's connection with this work was made very clear in the second edition, published in 1865, where his name appears on the title page as its printer. This

The work as a whole is designed to argue the arbitrary and invidious nature of all rigid caste distinctions, and to suggest that social divisions or occupations should be based on the merit and aptitude of each individual. Padaval tried to show, not only that no conventional *Kshatriya varna* could be said to exist in a pure form, but that all *varna* had been thoroughly mixed with each other. The whole edifice of caste division and caste purity rested on a delusion, energetically promoted by Brahman priests, and by the misplaced caste pride of other groups. Padaval lamented the misguided efforts of the very wide variety of caste groups whom he saw eagerly adopting the sacred thread, and claiming the twice-born status of *Kshatriyas*. In his account of the origins of the Maratha-*kunbi* caste complex, he also described its history of tension with Brahman opinion over the issue of *varna* status. He emphasised that the ability to put forward such demands was very much a function of Maratha political power.

Padaval described the growth of claims to *Kshatriya* status that had become evident among a very wide range of social groups:

> If you ask about the Kshatriya caste, then you will find Rajputs say, we are Kshatriya, Marathas say, we are Kshatriya, Prabhus say, we are Kshatriya, Panchakulase and Vadavala Sutars say, we are Kshatriya, of the lineage of the Moon, and the Khatris say, we are Kshatriya. But there is no certainty at all as to who among them are the original Kshatriyas.[63]

Padaval also saw intense activity among other castes, who demanded recognition of their status as *Vaishyas*, the third of the four *varnas*. In theory, this was the *varna* of the trading and mercantile castes. It also carried a twice-born status and the right to wear the sacred thread:

> Vanis, Telis, and Shimpis all attach the word 'Sheth', meaning 'superior' on to their names, and call themselves Vaishyas, and in this way, new Vaishyas are always being created. Some among these castes who call themselves Vaishya wear the sacred thread, and others do not. Some put it on whenever they feel like, regardless of the proper ceremonies, and then throw it off whenever they feel like it.[64]

Padaval then turned to similar social movements among the *kunbis* of western Maharashtra. He lamented the indiscriminate adoption of the sacred thread, and regretted the enthusiasm of the *kunbis* for calling themselves Maratha *Kshatriyas*:

connection does not entirely disqualify Padaval as an observer of processes of upward social mobility amongst the Maratha-*kunbis*, since there is no clear reason why he should have had a special interest in arguing that these processes existed. For this reason, and because direct observations in this area of social structure are so difficult to find for the mid-century, I have included his remarks.

63 Tukaram Tatya Padaval, *A Critique of Caste Divisions*, Bombay 1861, p. 34.

64 ibid., p. 35.

In the Laws of Manu, it says that Vaishyas should wear a sacred thread made of wool, and that Kshatriyas should wear one made of silk. But these days, people just put on any old thread to make themselves appear of a higher caste. Even the kunbi people now put on a great big thick sacred thread of cotton, just like that of the Brahmans, that reaches right down to their knees, and strut about calling themselves Maratha Kshatriyas.[65]

Padaval also suggested that the *varna* status which Brahman religious authorities judged proper for the elite Maratha families had fluctuated directly with the growth and decline of the latter's political power. Until the rise of the Maratha power, Padaval argued, the Brahmans had always regarded the Marathas as *Shudras*. When Shivaji had established his kingdom, however, the Brahmans determined his status to be that of a *Kshatriya*, gave him the sacred thread and established his right to have ceremonial texts drawn from the Vedas for his rituals. Since then, the Marathas had always worn the sacred thread and assumed the title of *Kshatriya*. As soon as the Brahmans saw, however, that the power of the Marathas was on the wane, they tried to undermine their *Kshatriya* status. When the Marathas approached their Brahman priests at the time of Shravan, for the yearly renewal of the sacred thread, the Brahmans tried to undermine their *Kshatriya* status by using the less sacred ritual formulae, taken from the *puranas*, that were fit only for *Shudras*.[66] Padaval's comments here are very significant. They show how an early non-Brahman polemicist perceived that *varna* status had never been just a matter of ritual, but was of directly political significance in the relations between Brahmans and Marathas. This suggests that there was an awareness of the long-standing disagreement over this issue, and that this was to feed directly into non-Brahman ideology.

Padaval also ascribed the distinctive customs of elite Maratha families to Muslim influence; and deplored their impracticability in the present day:

The Marathas lived within the Muslim state, and so they adopted many of their practices. What is called 'Marathmola' really only means keeping women in purdah. If a woman cannot ever meet her father or brother when they come to visit, who can she see! Even if the Marathas fall on very hard times, they will not allow the women out of doors, and because there are no servants in the house to bring water, the men have to do it themselves.[67]

Padaval's evidence concerning the growth of enthusiasm for a Maratha *Kshatriya* status in the mid-century are confirmed by a very different source: James Molesworth's *Marathi–English Dictionary*. Molesworth's explanation of Marathi terms in English demanded an

65 ibid. 66 ibid., pp. 53–4. 67 ibid., p. 54.

enormous amount of information about contemporary society in Maharashtra, and all this appears, very fortunately for historians, in the dictionary. His sources for his information were several prominent Brahman pandits, who are listed on the title page. Their perspective on Maharashtrian society would certainly have differed from that of Padaval. Yet they too observed the same attempts at upward mobility amongst the Maratha-*kunbis*. Explaining the Marathi term *janava*, 'sacred thread', the dictionary describes how 'at present several classes of people, Sutars, Sonars, Lohars and common Marathas, arrogating descent from the Kshatriya, or actuated by whim, adopt this thread'.[68]

The category 'Maratha' after 1870

From about 1870, we have increasingly numerous accounts of this area of social structure written by British observers, in a variety of official and unofficial capacities. These give us a perspective that is independent from the Marathi accounts. Overall, they confirm the impression that membership of the Maratha *Kshatriya* category was coming to be seen as a mark of improved social status to which any *kunbi* family of moderate determination and resource might aspire. This helped to link the category 'Maratha' more firmly and specifically with the caste cluster as a whole, and to supplant its older usage.

W. F. Sinclair, a member of the Bombay Civil Service, described the long-standing aspirations of elite Maratha families: 'The great jagirdars and Mankari families – that is, those who unite the profession of arms with hereditary office and landed estate (*vatan*) – claim to be pure kshatriyas, and allow no superiority to the proudest races of Rajasthan.' However, demands for a recognition of a Maratha and *Kshatriya* status were spread much more widely than this: 'Most Marathas in the military or civil service of Government call themselves kshatriyas, wear the sacred thread, and perform all proper observances.' Significantly, Sinclair argued that the fusion between Marathas and *kunbis* was at its greatest in the Pune district: 'In the Puna district, the words kunbi and Maratha are synonymous in conversation, because the land is mainly in the possession of this caste; but in Solapur and Khandesh the presence of other cultivating races necessitates the use of more accurate language, and therefore in the former district they always call themselves Marathas and in the latter Deckhanis.'[69] As we shall see, other sources confirm that the tendency for ordinary *kunbis* to call themselves

68 Molesworth's *Marathi–English Dictionary*, p. 314.

69 W. F. Sinclair, 'A Note on Castes in the Deccan', *Indian Antiquary*, May 1874, pp. 120–21.

Marathas was most noticeable in the Pune area – the birthplace of non-Brahman ideology.

Published for each district of the Bombay Presidency for the 1880s were the very valuable *Bombay Gazetteers*. Each volume contains painstaking descriptions of caste divisions, and domestic and ritual usages. All of the *Gazetteers* emphasise the fluidity of the division between Marathas and *kunbis*. The volume for Kolhapur described how 'as in other parts of the Bombay Deccan, the fighters among the Marathi-speaking middle classes claim to be called Marathas. Some families have perhaps an unusually large strain of Northern or Rajput blood, but as a class Marathas cannot be distinguished from Marathi-speaking Deccan kunbis, with whom all eat and the poorer intermarry.'[70] The difference between them was a matter of status only, and this was frequently overcome: 'Kunbis are socially lower than Marathas. But a well-to-do kunbi calls himself a Maratha, and poor Marathas freely and openly marry with rich kunbis.'[71] The *Gazetteer* for Pune district tells much the same tale, but adds that 'The Poona Kunbis, not content with calling themselves Marathas, go so far as to call themselves Kshatriyas and wear the sacred thread.'[72]

The *Gazetteer* for Ratnagiri district described how many of those who called themselves Marathas wore the sacred thread, but that they had no rigid rule on this:

> Some among them wear the sacred thread, *janave*, renewing it yearly in Shravan (August). All claim the right to wear the thread, but as it has to be renewed every year, and the ceremony seldom costs less than 6d to 1/- (4–8 annas) they do not all wear it. It often happens that only one brother of a family adopts the practice.[73]

The *Gazetteer* for Kolaba district also found that very many peasant families wore the sacred thread, and commented: 'Considering how many Marathas and Kunbis wear the sacred thread, it seems surprising that Shivaji should not have been invested with it as a boy.'[74]

One of the best ways of illustrating this identification with the category of 'Maratha', and how widely it had spread throughout the whole caste complex by the end of the century, is to look at the Census Reports for the Bombay Presidency. The table that follows shows the very large proportion of the larger caste grouping that claimed a Maratha identity of some kind by 1901.

70 *Bombay Gazetteer*, Bombay 1886, vol. XXIV (Kolhapur), p. 65.
71 ibid., p. 89.
72 *Bombay Gazetteer*, Bombay 1885, vol. XVIII, pt I (Poona), p. 284.
73 *Bombay Gazetteer*, Bombay 1880, vol. X (Ratnagiri and Savantavadi), p. 123.
74 *Bombay Gazetteer*, Bombay 1883, vol. XI (Kolaba), p. 370.

*Main social categories and their territorial distribution of the Maratha-'kunbi' complex of castes in the western districts of the Bombay Presidency according to the Census Report of 1901**

	Khandesh	*Nasik*	*Thana*	*Bombay city*
Kunbis	328,007	149,174	47,974	–
Marathas:	93,681	162,617	107,305	221,872
Marathas proper	84,397	152,872	38,899	7,758
Konkani Marathas	9,284	9,745	13,527	93,036
Maratha *kunbis*	–	–	55,079	122,036
	Kolaba	*Poona*	*Ahmednagar*	*Satara*
Kunbis	13,835	98,183	16,991	48,102
Marathas:	196,510	332,786	326,662	584,195
Marathas proper	86,313	89,160	326,283	111,445
Konkani Marathas	42,354	3,564	379	3,393
Maratha *kunbis*	67,856	260,197	–	460,357
	Ratnagiri	*Kolhapur*	*Belgaum*	*Sholapur*
Kunbis	285,123	–	1,771	5,472
Marathas:	287,473	431,836	185,292	220,480
Marathas proper	81,156	40,428	53,402	220,313
Konkani Marathas	137,208	8,092	7,003	167
Maratha *kunbis*	66,910	383,216	131,887	–

**Source:* These figures are taken from the Census of India (Bombay Presidency), 1901, vol. 9a, table VIII, pp. 161–216, showing the distribution of castes by districts and states.

From these figures, it seems possible to discern a rough overall pattern for the distribution of these social groups. It is clear that the numbers of those claiming a Maratha status of some kind far exceeded those returning themselves simply as *kunbis*. The only exceptions to this were in the two northern districts of Khandesh and Nasik, and in the southern coastal district of Ratnagiri, where the proportions were more equal, or the numbers of *kunbis* exceeded those returning themselves as Marathas. In Khandesh and Nasik, this may be explained by the absence of any substantial group calling themselves Maratha

kunbis; in the former because very few claimed any sort of Maratha status at all; and in the latter because those that did call themselves Marathas returned themselves largely as Marathas proper. In Ratnagiri, the intermediate group of Maratha *kunbis* is similarly weak. The figures for Thana and Kolaba in the northern part of the Konkan show, on the other hand, a great majority of Marathas over *kunbis*, and quite a large number of these returning themselves as Marathas proper. The vast majority of the caste complex in Bombay city returned themselves as Maratha *kunbis*, no *kunbis* being returned for the city at all. Moving now to the districts lying down the centre of western Maharashtra, from the top of the *ghats* extending eastwards on the Deccan plateau, the districts of Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, and Belgaum, the great majority returned themselves as Maratha *kunbis*. No groups at all returned themselves as *kunbis* in Kolhapur, perhaps due to its postition as a very strong centre of elite Maratha culture. In the most eastern districts of western Maharashtra, Ahmednagar and Sholapur, the same pattern was repeated even more strongly, almost all groups claiming to be Marathas proper, and none at all returning themselves simply as *kunbis*.

Conclusion

What emerges most strongly from all this is the extent to which the term 'Maratha' had changed its application since the beginning of the nineteenth century. From being a title without particular social prominence, used loosely to describe all Marathi-speakers, or narrowly to define a small elite of powerful families, it had been transformed into a very broad social category in which almost every social group working on the land could claim inclusion. These new meanings of the term were to be determined by the larger debate over the real nature of Maharashtra's history and culture, and by non-Brahman ideology, which formed a vocal part of this debate. In these exchanges, the term 'Maratha' itself came to symbolise the larger heritage of Maharashtrian culture. Where this heritage was determined, as it was in non-Brahman ideology, to be one of rulership, identification with the land, and martial prowess, the category of 'Maratha' as an elite status took on a strengthened appeal and a new significance. These changes converted the term into a powerful instrument of polemic. If Maharashtra was the Marathas, then those calling themselves such could claim a powerful new degree of representativeness and social leadership before the British government. This could be made the basis for more concrete demands for a share of education, government jobs, and other social benefits such as befitted the inheritors and representatives of Maharash-

tra's traditions. The effectiveness of such rhetoric would be increased as further peasant groups claimed a Maratha identity. The gains to be made by such an identification were to act as a powerful stimulus upon the movements of upward mobility already in train. This polemical advantage was to be made complete when, by the turn of the century, non-Brahman ideologues succeeded in impressing their own meaning upon the term 'Maratha' in popular usage. They gave it, if not an overtly anti-Brahman meaning, at least one that excluded or implied a difference from Brahmans and other social groups. We will examine in more detail the working out of this relationship between non-Brahman ideology and the emergence of a new, mass Maratha identity in the final chapters of this book.

3

The crisis of cultural legitimacy: missionaries, reformers, and Hindu society in the mid-nineteenth century

Introduction

It was not only from the processes described in chapter 2 that polemicists, such as Jotirao Phule, were to draw their material. They also made use of a wide variety of arguments and ideas associated with protestant missionaries, European radicals and free-thinkers, as well as other Indian reformers themselves. This chapter has two aims. The first is to examine the structure and content of missionary propaganda, and other ideas from Europe, that were in circulation amongst the small circles of the western-educated in the cities and smaller provincial towns of western Maharashtra. The second is to argue that these ideas were of enormous importance in shaping reformist opinion. However, the connection between them requires very careful elucidation, both in terms of the groups that were actually influenced in this way, and of the interaction of ideas about Hindu society and British rule. This analysis will form the prelude to the next chapter which examines the ideas of prominent Hindu reformers in western India, and of the religious milieu in which Phule's own ideas were formed.

The 1830s and 1840s saw in western India the creation of a new periodical press, both in English and in Marathi. The press was aimed largely at the small groups of the western-educated. It was the creation in part of protestant missionaries, and in part of prominent and energetic Hindus themselves, who were anxious to create a new intellectual community of the western-educated, and to debate amongst themselves the momentous issues of social change, political tutelage, and scientific advances, that were associated with British rule. In 1832, the reformer Bal Shastri Jambhekar launched the first Anglo-Marathi newspaper in Bombay, the *Darpan*. This was followed by the *Dig-Darshan* in 1840, and the socially radical *Prabhakar* in 1841. In 1842, the American missionaries launched the very popular Anglo-Marathi *Dynanodaya*, 'The Rise of Knowledge', which was to be one of the most successful Marathi newspapers of the 1850s and 1860s.

What was most striking about the tone of this new periodical press was its readiness, indeed its eagerness, to discuss the failures of Hindu

society. Newspapers such as the *Darpan* and the *Prabhakar* drew attention to the inadequacy of contemporary social forms to meet the economic, technological, and ideological challenges created under British rule. They dwelt on the failure of Hindu society to provide a durable basis for an ordered political life; on its incomplete or inaccurate understanding of the material world; and on the positively destructive effects of some of its most tenaciously observed religious beliefs and practices upon a very wide variety of social groups. This sense of the defectiveness of the structures and beliefs of Hindu society was accompanied by an intense search for modifications and substitutes. In the process, Hindu writers and reformers questioned the very grounds on which Hindu religion and society seemed to be constitituted, and the legitimacy of their claims to respect and obedience from Hindus themselves.

The question that suggests itself immediately on any reading of the periodical press and other social reform literature of the period concerns precisely this process of cultural breakdown. The question of the influence of Christian or other western ideas upon social reform movements has always been one of the normal subjects of scholarly concern for historians of nineteenth-century India. Yet relatively little attention has been paid to the causes of what amounted to a crisis in social and political values.[1] It is assumed, quite rightly, that it has external origins, most obviously in the attempts of missionaries to discredit Hindu religious beliefs, and in the processes of education and secularisation more generally associated with British rule. No study, of western India at least, has explained exactly why traditional systems of thought about the nature of God, the proper administration of society, or the workings of the natural world, seemed to succumb so easily to quite alien systems of thought and value, at least among those with any degree of contact with the administrative and educational institutions of British rule. No doubt, Christian missionaries in all three Presidencies were extremely active in their efforts at proselytisation. They conceived

1 See for example, G. A. Oddie, *Social Protest in India: British Protestant Missionaries and Social Reform, 1850–1900*, Manohar, Delhi 1979, pp. 69–74. Oddie attempts to assess the influence of missionary propaganda on Hindu social reform movements, but goes no further than to say that missionary ideas must have encouraged such movements. See also Duncan B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India*, Curzon Press, London 1980, especially the chapter 'Hindu Responses to the Missionary Attack on Caste'. Forrester here describes the different Hindu responses to missionary and more broadly western and liberal ideas, from Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo Samaj to Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvepalli Radhakrishana, but does not address the underlying question of why, in the first place, Christian propaganda should have been felt to be so subversive of conventional Hindu beliefs by many western-educated Hindus.

it as one of their main functions to undermine the public credibility of Hindu religious belief and social practice, using whatever means came to hand: antiquarian researches to show the discrepancies between ancient and modern Hindu beliefs; 'common-sense' objections to apparent contradictions in social practices; and humanitarian expressions of horror at the social consequences of some traditional values. However, the mere expression of disapproval by protestant missionaries of Christian propaganda about the sin of idolatry, the urgent need for repentance, or the wrath of Christ at the day of judgement, is by no means sufficient to account for the very widely shared sense that Hindu society was in some way debilitated in the moral sphere, and inadequate in secular affairs. Contrary to missionary expectations, in very few cases did radicals and reformers espouse overtly Christian beliefs. They accepted and adopted as their own the most violent condemnations of Hindu social institutions, but without identifying themselves with any specific Christian religious doctrines. Rather, Hindu social reformers of almost all shades of opinion accepted a religious worldview that seemed to belong immediately to no particular religious confession. This worldview emphasised the desacrilisation of the natural world, and put forward the idea of a unique Creator removed from his creation, a Creator who represented the ultimate standard of goodness and justice for the guidance of man's moral and spiritual life. This idea was then applied to human social affairs, to assert the basic equality of all men before the Creator, the contingency of all human hierarchies, and the greater value of individual effort and merit in human society over status ascribed by birth or office.

Two quite distinct sets of ideas contributed to this shift in religious and social values, as its external causes. The first was transmitted in the highly public propaganda of Christian missionaries and evangelicals. The second consisted of religious and social ideas taken from the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe. These were still very much a matter for debate in radical circles in early nineteenth-century England. They included deist ideas in religion, the rejection of traditional religious hierarchies and the re-examination of the claims of revealed religion. They were also characterised by a concern with the natural and political rights of the individual in society. These two sets of ideas, the one a missionary statement of protestant Christianity, and the other a distinct radicalism both in religious and political matters, were apparently deeply divergent. Nevertheless, they worked in practice in the same direction to reinforce one another in mid-nineteenth-century western India. Together, they helped to produce the breakdown of belief in existing Hindu institutions amongst a highly influential section of the western-educated.

This was not quite the paradox that it at first seems. Protestant missionaries attacked the apparent superstition and idolatry of Hindu religion, its belief in magic, its trust in religious texts whose contents seemed improbable and contradictory, and its faith in a priesthood that seemed to have lost sight of its spiritual mission. In doing so, they used arguments that bore a strong structural resemblance to those employed by European religious radicals against the corruptions of the European catholic church. Certainly in the case of the protestant missionaries active in western India, who had been strongly influenced by the evangelical revival at the end of the eighteenth century, this was not a process of direct borrowing. In common with most Establishment protestants, missionaries in western India abhorred the beliefs and remonstrated against the influence of the European 'atheists', such as Voltaire, Count Volney, and Thomas Paine, whose works were popular amongst western-educated Hindus.[2]

The similarity of their arguments arose, rather, from the strategies that were adopted by the missionaries as the most effective means of undermining Hindu religious beliefs. These strategies were very similar, because missionaries and European radicals perceived similar features in the respective objects of their reforming zeal. Both set themselves in opposition to a priesthood that had wrongly interposed itself between the believer and his God. Both attacked a conception of the divine that blurred and obfuscated both the uniqueness of the Creator and his essential separation, both from the natural world, and from all the constructs of human society; and each condemned the elaborate rituals to which this confusion had given rise. They questioned a faith in religious texts that failed to stand the test of human reason. Finally, each claimed that these religious systems, with their endowment of human authorities and hierarchies with divine sanction, had produced a stagnation in society that denied proper freedoms, stifled individual merit and talent, and impeded the workings of man's reason and the progress of human knowledge.

Missionaries felt that the best means of proselytisation lay not in an emphasis on the specific doctrines of Christianity as a revealed religion, but upon the normative and cognitive framework in which they were located. This distinction between specific doctrine and ideological

2 C. F. Volney (1757–1820) was a French political and religious radical, often thought to have influenced Thomas Paine. Volney's most famous work, *The Ruins: or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, published in 1791, was an astonishingly radical attack on revealed religion and on the legitimacy of secular authority that claimed to be founded on revealed religion. For a general account of European religious radicalism towards the end of the eighteenth century, see N. Hampson, *The Enlightenment*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1968, and R. J. White, *The Anti-Philosophers: A Study of the Philosophes in Eighteenth Century France*, Macmillan, London 1970.

framework is crucial for our understanding of the structure and effectiveness of missionary polemic. In missionary propaganda, overtly Christian doctrines about the human soul and original sin; the importance of individual faith and good works in life and the fate of the soul after death; the redemption of sin; the death of Christ; and the fulfilment of God's plan on the day of judgement, were situated ideologically within a broader and internally coherent framework of belief. This concerned the nature of God and his attitude to his human creatures; the relations between society and the individual; the role of Christian nations in the world; and the workings of the material universe. Some of these latter beliefs belonged typically to the social and scientific worldview of early nineteenth-century educated British society; others represented a more enduring part of the Christian account of the relations between God and world.

In this broader framework of belief, God appeared as the unique source of all creation and, in his absolute purity, as the definitive opposite of sin and evil. Although he might act in the world as Providence, he remained essentially separate from all merely human social constructs, exercising only the moral government which formed the ultimate criterion for their legitimacy. This moral government placed the subjective values of individual merit and virtue above the ascriptive values of status conferred by human, social, or religious hierarchies. God had no inherent existence in the natural world and the material universe. In their miraculous harmony and regularity, they stood divested of all magical or sacred significance, available for investigation and understanding by man's practical reason, standing before him as the testimony to the ultimate power of the Creator and to the unity of religious and scientific truth. In England, certainly before the mid-century, most scientific attempts to understand different aspects of the workings of the natural world were dominated by the notion that all such investigations could only confirm existing ideas of the beauty and harmony of the universe that testified to the glory of its Creator. These were certainly the assumptions that underlay one of the most ambitious attempts in the early part of the century to collect and extend scientific knowledge, the *Bridgewater Treatises*.[3] The mid-nineteenth-century trust in absolute social progress also characterised this framework of belief. It projected a view of the development of the world's history which compared the social, scientific, and material

3 For a short account of the developing relationship between religious and scientific ideas in early nineteenth-century England, see Owen Chadwick, 'Religion and Science in Victorian England: Legend and Reality', *Australian and New Zealand Theological Review*: Supplement to Colloquium: Selwyn Lectures 1967.

conditions of western Christian nations with the Hindu and Muslim societies of India, and pronounced their superior social progress to be the result of belief in Christian truths.[4]

This ideological framework possessed no structurally essential connections with specifically Christian doctrines. It formed in itself a general account of the nature of God and the world which could be used quite independently of professedly Christian beliefs. This more general framework of values and beliefs possessed a degree of forcible conviction that would always have been lacking in the advocacy of avowedly Christian doctrines. This conviction derived from its connection with apparently secular and quite objective truths of overwhelming importance for the future welfare and prosperity of Indian society. For Hindu reformers, the acceptance of these truths pointed, also, to an acceptance of the ideological framework from which they seemed to emerge, and to a wholesale withdrawal of belief from the Hindu practices and institutions whose validity these truths called into question.

First, there were the glaringly obvious discrepancies between the social and material successes of Indian and western societies – or at least in the aspects of western societies that were presented to Indians themselves.[5] There was the emergent capacity of western societies to understand and manipulate the material world. The advances of nineteenth-century science were presented as at one with the truths of Christian religion. Its discoveries about the construction of the natural world and the material universe appeared as an irrefutable testimony to the inadequacy or hopeless inaccuracy of Hindu accounts, from the realms of science in geography and astrology, to the projection of a natural world invested with divine forces. The political sphere also seemed to present quite objective truths about the inadequacy of Indian society, in its failure even to maintain itself against external enemies, let alone to provide a stable internal order. Finally, the advance of human progress, presented in nineteenth-century historical accounts, seemed to require a fundamental shift in the conventional Hindu view of India's position among other societies. In place of its projection as the land of *punya*, the blessed home of human happiness and virtue and the

4 This was one of the main arguments of Murray Mitchell's *Letters to Indian Youth on the Evidences of the Christian Religion, with a Brief Examination of the Evidences of Hinduism and Muhamadanism*, Madras 1861, pp. 84–9. The book was enormously popular: it went through seven editions between 1861 and 1894.

5 These were, of course, by no means the same thing. What is remarkable is the success with which both missionaries and the larger East India Company establishment in India managed, in their public exchanges with Indian reformers, to divert attention away from the areas of English society that plainly gave the lie to the image of prosperity and equality, so that this rarely featured as an element in the arguments of the defenders of Hindu society.

receptacle of religious truth, nineteenth-century historical writing consigned India to the ranks of the losers in the advance of human societies to the highest state of civilisation, an object for the compassion and charitable help of more successful societies.[6]

This account was, of course, a highly partial and biased one, with its roots in a specifically and intensely Eurocentric worldview. However, these distortions lay obscured in the process of debate amongst reformers, missionaries and the defenders of the *status quo*. Linked with the Christian account were apparently secular and quite objective facts, from accounts of the workings of nature to the differential progress of human societies. These links were forged and reinforced in missionary propaganda itself. Missionaries sought to lead Hindus to an acceptance of Christian beliefs through the admission of these secular truths and of the framework of beliefs with which they seemed to go hand in hand. The apparent connections of Christian doctrine with objective truths about the world constituted the great polemical strength of missionary propaganda. It was used indiscriminately in the mid-century debates. The acceptance by a wide range of Hindu reformers and radicals, both of their secular accuracy and their great potential for human benefit, coalesced with the objective fact of Indian defeat, to produce an account of Indian society which saw only a series of shortcomings. This account depicted the corruption of old ideals, the stagnation of knowledge, the petrification of social classes, the stifling of merit, and the triumph of a self-seeking priesthood. Defeat was less a matter for resistance, and more a just retribution and a providential chance to build anew under a more enlightened leadership. Finally, the search for the means of this reconstruction took radicals and reformers back to the ideological framework within which early nineteenth-century Christianity was presented, and of which these apparently secular truths formed an integral, if heavily disguised, part. They turned to the belief in a unitary Creator as the ultimate source of moral government for human societies, and in a natural world divested of sacred significance. They rejected the ascriptive values of Hindu social hierarchies and affirmed that individual human merit should form the only valid basis for social and religious hierarchies. They argued that present social welfare was

6 The most notable example of this view is, of course, James Mill's *History of British India*, first published in 1817, and later edited and continued by the scholar H. H. Wilson. Wilson's annotation of Mill's original work refers frequently to his characterisation of Hindu society as primitive and backward. In the preface to the fourth edition of 1840, Wilson laments the damage done to relations between East India Company servants and Hindus, owing to the 'unrelenting pertinacity with which he labours to establish the barbarism of the Hindus', an opinion which Company servants had 'imbibed in early life from the History of Mr Mill'.

more important than strict adherence to traditional religious observances.

In this way, the missionary agency of protestant Christianity in western India meant that in much of its proselytisation it emphasised the ideological framework of Christian belief. Missionaries dwelt upon secular truths with which Christianity seemed inseparably connected, as much as the particular doctrines of the Christian faith. Protestant missionaries were also to use the fruits of European radical religion, although this was in quite a different way, and at one remove. The Enlightenment tradition of the rational criticism of the claims of revealed religions had found some of its most extreme representatives in writers like C. F. Volney and Thomas Paine, as mentioned above. This tradition also set the precedent for a much less controversial variety of scholarly criticism that was to develop from the end of the eighteenth century, and to apply itself to the study of Oriental religious institutions, beliefs, and texts. From the early work of Orientalists such as Alexander Dow, Nathaniel Halhed and Sir William Jones at the College of Fort William in Calcutta, there grew the tradition of the learned criticism of different aspects of Hindu religion and society, and the reflection of their development in Hindu religious texts.[7] Although the Orientalist sympathy for, and interest in, Indian religions was soon to be overwhelmed by the less compromising and more overtly anti-Hindu attitudes of the 1820s and 1830s, the same tradition was continued in the work of scholars like H. H. Wilson and Max Müller in England, and Professor C. Lassen in Germany.[8] Their scholarly productions were in their turn rewritten into popular accounts suitable for the serious layman, such as Dr John Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts, on the Origin and Progress of the Religion and Institutions of India, collected, translated into English and illustrated by notes.* These were published in four volumes between 1858 and 1863, and reprinted in five volumes from 1869.[9]

7 For an account of the growth of Orientalist scholarship from the late eighteenth century, see P. J. Marshall, *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press 1970, pp. 1–44.

8 A general account of this shift in attitudes is in D. Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: the Dynamics of Indian Modernisation 1773–1835*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1969, pp. 167–77. Details of the work of Max Müller and other European Sanskrit scholars are in N. C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary: the Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller, P. C.*, Chatto and Windus, London 1974, pp. 123–46.

9 John Muir acknowledged his debts to H. H. Wilson, Max Müller, and Professor C. Lassen for information on the Vedas, to the French scholar M. Langlois for his account of the *Harivamsa*, and to M. Burnouf for his translation of the *Bhagavat purana*. John Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. 1, pp. iii–iv.

Both popularising authors and professional scholars might be more or less objective in their accounts of ancient and modern Hindu society and religion. Yet it was not from any transmitted bias that missionaries were able to draw material for their attack on Hinduism as a revealed religion. It was rather from the simple provision of information about the dating, authorship, internal consistency, and material contents of its sacred texts, and their relationship with ancient and modern social institutions. The transmission of such information to Hindus themselves was naturally seen by the missionaries as a powerful means of undermining belief in the most ancient Hindu texts as the eternal word of God. They used it also to attack the notion that Hindu beliefs formed a stable and consistent body of ideas, and thus to deny the possession by Hindu social institutions of any legitimate religious basis. The strength of missionary polemic thus profited from its apparent ability to employ scholarly materials, of impeccable objectivity, in support of its denial of the divine origins of Hindu religion. This strength was only intensified when, as in the case of John Muir, the popularisers of scholarly research themselves revealed a strong Christian bias. Muir, the author of several Christian tracts as well as the *Original Sanskrit Texts*, intended the latter to 'assist the researches of those Hindus who may desire to investigate critically the most important points in the civil and religious history of their nation'.[10] The first volume examined the mythical accounts of the origins of castes given in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the writings of Manu, the *Bhagavat*, Vishnu, and Vayu *puranas*, the *Harivamsa*, and the *Mahabharat*, commenting on the inconsistencies of different authors. The second volume advanced the theory that central Asia had been the cradle of a common Aryan civilisation, in which the Indian, Persian, Greek, and Roman peoples had shared a common culture. It described the Aryan invasions of the sub-continent and the relations of the Aryans with the indigenous inhabitants, events which were echoed in the hymns of the *Rgveda*:

> the ancient bards designated the men of their own tribes by the name of Aryas, and distinguished them expressly from another class of people called Dasyus, who, we have every reason to suppose, were a race of distinct origin from the Aryas, and different from them in colour, in language, in religion and in customs, who had been in occupation of India before it was entered by the Indo-Aryans from the northwest.[11]

The third volume described the origin and authorship of the Vedas, describing how, as in the case of Greek heroic poetry, they came to be attributed a divine origin:

10 John Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. 3, p. v.

11 ibid., vol. 2, p. 373.

> The indistinct, and perhaps hesitating belief which some of the ancient *rshis* seem to have entertained in their own inspiration was not suffered to die out in the minds of later generations. On the contrary, this belief grew up by degrees into a fixed persuasion that all the literary productions of those early sages had not only resulted from a supernal impulse, but were infallible, divine and even eternal. These works have become the sacred scriptures of India.[12]

The last volume compared the descriptions of the deities Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra given in the Vedic hymns with those in the *puranas*, showing how the earlier conceptions had been gradually modified in the later works.

The effects of accounts and translations such as these upon Hindu reformers, both in directly furnishing apparently objective information about the origins of contemporary Hindu society, and in providing missionary polemicists with material for their arguments, were greatly reinforced by the direct influence of deist and religious radical thought from Europe. The presence of this influence, both in the form of popular literature, and of atheist, deist, or free-thinking Europeans (often teachers in government schools), was of crucial importance for the decline of belief in traditional institutions and practices, and for the growth of radical and reformist opinion. One of the most important arguments of eighteenth-century deists and religious radicals, and the inheritors of this tradition amongst the free-thinkers and political radicals of early nineteenth-century England, was their denial that any of the world's religious confessions contained a direct divine revelation. Radical writers and polemicists supported this argument with a detailed examination of the Old and New Testaments, denying the consistency of large parts of them either with human reason, or with the absolute purity and universality of the Creator as they envisaged him. By the powers of his critical reason, man could know all the true propositions of theology that it was necessary for him to know, and from these observations could arrive at a knowledge of his spiritual duty to worship his Creator, and his moral duty to refrain from harming his neighbour. Giving reasons such as these, European religious radicals provided arguments that Hindu reformers and radicals could use against Christian doctrines, arguments that had exactly the same structure as those that missionaries used against Hindu beliefs. This meant that the alternative to traditional belief for Hindu reformers, influenced in this way, was not simply to be a conversion to Christianity, since it suffered from exactly the same inconsistencies as Hinduism. Much more convincing was the view of an impersonal and universal Creator, and of religious and moral duties for man entirely consistent with human

12 ibid., vol. 3, p. 171.

reason that were put forward in the work of European deists and radicals. It was exactly at this point that the emphasis of missionary protestantism upon the ideological framework of belief coincided with the religious worldview of eighteenth-century deism.[13] Both laid emphasis on the uniqueness of the Creator and his separateness from his creation. Each stressed, in the face of human error and superstition, the power of man's reason in leading him towards both religious and scientific truth. Both called for the abolition of human authorities and hierarchies that seemed to impede the free play of man's reason and the progress of his understanding of the material world. In identifying themselves with this set of beliefs, moreover, Hindu reformers did not deprive themselves of the connection with the secular truths of human progress that were so strenuously pressed by the missionaries. On the contrary, the assaults of European radicals on the inconsistency, superstition, and downright immorality to be found in the Bible made it seem to Hindu reformers that the advance of secular knowledge and material progress would be much more likely to be the product of the belief in a more universal Creator, and in a more substantial role for human reason.

In the case of Hindu reformers and radicals, the missionary effort was in this way sabotaged by its own parallelism with the tradition of European religious radicalism, and by the direct influence of that tradition in western India. From this play of influences there emerged from the mid-nineteenth century the spectrum of reform opinion which we will be examining, extending from the deist convictions of the Paramahansa Mandali, to the outright radicalism and anti-clericalism of Phule himself.

The framework of the mid-century debates

This crisis in the public legitimacy of existing Hindu institutions and values, acutely felt amongst articulate and centrally placed groups of Hindus, was to help form the intellectual milieu from which emerged such lower caste critics of Hindu religious hierarchies as Phule. It might be objected, against the idea of any such crisis in values, that the actual numbers of Hindus who read or heard about these debates, or who thought about Hindu society in such terms, were relatively very small. The vast majority of Hindus in the *mofussil*, and many of those in the urban centres, possessed little knowledge of the issues that were discussed, and they remained unchanged in their attitudes to contem-

13 I take my definition of deism here from P. P. Wiener, *A Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Charles Scribner, New York 1968–73, vol. 1, pp. 646–7.

porary society and religion. Of those who were aware of the debates between reformers, missionaries, and the orthodox, many were hostile to new ideas, and to the unfavourable comparisons between India and western countries that were made both by protestant missionaries and Hindu reformers. Moreover, those Hindus who were hostile were quick and vociferous in their attacks upon a worldview that often seemed to claim for itself a monopoly of scientific, religious, and political truth.

At the same time, both missionaries and reformers strove very hard, in their different ways, to reach a wider audience. Intense publicity always surrounded any interchange between missionaries and the orthodox. The missionaries based their strategy, in part, upon the large-scale production of cheap religious tracts and books that were intended to provoke critical discussion. They believed that Hindu ideas could best be refuted in the course of open debate. Much proselytisation was carried out in the form of large public meetings that all could attend. The wayside pulpit also formed an important feature of their campaigning. This opened the way for a diffusion of new ideas to a much wider and less literate audience. New ideas could then be further digested and passed on amongst Hindus themselves, through gossip, rumour, local discussion groups, and impromptu meetings.

Prominent social reformers also sought to reach a larger audience, and to create a recognised arena for the discussion of what seemed to them issues of overwhelming importance for India's future. The attempt to create such an arena was a phenomenon quite new in western India. Indian religious life had, of course, its own traditions of debate. But in the past these had tended always to address themselves to the limited audience of a particular *sampradaya* or individual religious sect. This was true, for example of the *bhakti* devotional cults of western India. Much of the work of the Marathi saint–writers of this religious tradition contained a strong dislike of any rigid equivalence of spiritual merit with high caste status. It placed the individual's love of God as a virtue that stood above all, regardless of caste or secular position. This was particularly true of the seventeenth-century *bhakti* poet Tukaram. Yet these kinds of criticism never burgeoned into a self-conscious intellectual attempt to confront and refute religious values that emphasised the caste hierarchy and religious pre-eminence of the Brahman. They remained a spiritual solace for individual believers, rather than the ground for a direct challenge to the position of the Brahman as the mediator between the Hindus and the high gods in ritual, and the arbiters of religious rectitude in their role as interpreters of the Hindu scriptures.[14]

14 For a more detailed discussion of devotional traditions, see chapter 14, pp. 221–5.

What distinguished the social reformers of the nineteenth century was precisely the drive to transcend the isolated social or religious group and appeal to the community at large. In part, this was simply an attempt to secure a wider audience, and win recognition of the agenda for social reform that they had drawn up, amongst as broad a range of social groups as possible. However, the position taken by many of the most prominent Hindu social reformers in western India also represented a much more fundamental change in the social significance and implications of the debate itself.

What was most significant here was the ability of reformers to invoke the 'public interest' in their opposition to existing beliefs and institutions. This strongly held notion introduced a new degree of radicalism in its ideas of the way that important issues affecting the whole community should be determined. Such radicalism would have been out of the ordinary in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, and is quite astonishing in the context of western India. Hindu social reformers based many of their arguments on the idea that the 'public interest' represented a 'universal' good. The reformers opposed this to many existing social and religious practices, which served only the interests of particular groups. They laid great emphasis on the frequent conflict between the partial and selfish concerns of particular social groups and the good of the community as a whole. To this idea of the public interest attached an overwhelming social imperative. It transcended all particular interests, and formed the final criterion for assessing social, religious, and political activity at all levels of society.

This had important implications for the development of reformist and radical thought in the mid-century, and for the crisis in traditional values that accompanied it. The idea of the good of the community as the paramount social value was set up against the traditional means of conferring legitimacy upon social and religious institutions. In place of the appeal to prescription, to the social regulations outlined in religious writings, or to the special religious privileges of high caste groups, radicals and reformers could assert the social imperative of the present welfare of the community. The effectiveness of such an assertion lay in the creation of a compelling new set of values for the legitimation of social and religious forms that rivalled, and threatened to displace, the traditional sources of social and religious authority. Such appeals to the present good of the community as a whole came to form one of the most important instruments of reformist polemic. In particular, it came to be associated with the appeals to social utility of high caste and gradualist reformers, who based their arguments upon the sheer wastage of India's human and material resources caused by traditional practices.

The debates also reflected a changing conception of the role of the individual Hindu. The idea of the 'public interest' as a paramount social value has by definition the notion of distributive social justice as its basis, set up in opposition to the dominance of particular interests in the administration of social affairs. Every socially concerned individual could claim an interest in its protection, and in the determination of social questions. In the debates of the mid-century, designed to be available to as broad a range of social groups as possible, and taking as their subject literally the core beliefs and practices of Hindu religion, it was suggested that the structure of Hindu society itself was open to discussion, criticism, and ultimately to determination by every concerned and informed Hindu. In this way, the creation of a public arena for debate presented radicals and reformers not only with the physical means for the expression and propagation of their views, but with the conviction that the determination of these major public issues belonged ultimately to concerned individuals like themselves. This was evident in the increase and popularity of the original correspondence received and published by all the major vernacular periodicals, and in the growing popular willingness they revealed to discuss and criticise social and religious issues of every description.

The origins of this new ideological framework for the administration of 'public' concerns, upon which Hindu social reformers of many different shades of opinion based their arguments, form a fascinating subject for research. In part, they can be traced to a similar development in early nineteenth-century British politics, and to the emergence of a similar vocabulary of 'public concern' amongst radical groups in the debates over political reform in the 1820s and early 1830s.[15]

Missionary polemic in the debates: the background

We turn now to an analysis of protestant missionary propaganda itself. The missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland, with the American mission, took the lead in the proselytisation of western India. The Church of Scotland missionaries were very much a product of the movement, in Britain, away from the sympathetic understanding and tolerance of Hinduism that had distinguished the early Orientalists in Bengal, towards the evangelical and Eurocentric attitudes of Lord Bentinck's administration. The work of Alexander Duff in Bengal exercised a formative influence on missionary efforts in this period. Duff's strategy consisted in a direct assault on the central stronghold of

15 For an account of political radicalism in early nineteenth-century England, see R. J. White, *Waterloo to Peterloo*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1968, pp. 65–86.

Hindu society through the conversion of its leaders. This was to be achieved through a massive educational effort, in which instruction in western arts and sciences was accompanied by a teaching of the Christian scriptures. Duff argued that religious truth, social progress, and the advance of scientific understanding were inseparably connected with each other. All truth derived ultimately from the same Christian source. Western learning in India would naturally create the desire for the Christian truth on which it was built.[16]

Both Scottish and American missionary activities were informed by a passionate conviction of the absolute moral evil of Hinduism. It was offensive in the sight of God. The duty of every Christian was to drive back the demons of idolatry and superstition with the sword of Christian truth. Like Duff, they believed that the most direct way to undermine belief in Hindu institutions lay in the proselytisation of its leaders. In addition to popular evangelism at the wayside pulpit, therefore, they set as a most important task the assault upon Hinduism at the intellectual level, and the challenge of its religious authorities to debate in the public arena of the new pamphlet and periodical press. In addition to the preaching of specific Christian doctrines, they emphasised the ideological framework within which they were situated. This was not merely as an extension of a particular religious confession. Rather, it represented the only account of the nature of God, his relations with society and the individual, and the nature of his creation in the material world, that could possibly be accepted by the educated and the intelligent in the era of social and religious progress that had dawned with the new century.

These principles were evident in the work of individual missionaries. The most prominent of the Scottish ones were John Wilson; James and Murray Mitchell, who divided their time between Bombay and Pune; Stephen Hislop, who worked in Nagpur; and Robert Nesbit, who worked in Nasik and Ahmadnagar.[17] From the arrival of the first

16 Alexander Duff's work is treated at length in J. M. Orr, 'The Contribution of Scottish Missions to the Rise of Responsible Churches in India', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1967, pp. 73–101; and M. Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793–1836*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972, pp. 201–36. On the part of Scottish missionaries like Duff, this zeal was in part the product of the evangelical revival in Scotland itself, which took place under the guidance of Methodist leaders such as George Whitby and John Wesley. This had issued in the 1790s in a great surge of enthusiasm for missionary work, and the founding of the Glasgow Missionary Society and the Scottish Missionary Society in Edinburgh: see J. M. Orr, 'The Contribution of Scottish Missions', pp. 63–9.

17 For further details of the lives of these missionaries, see G. Smith, *Life of John Wilson*, Edinburgh 1878; Murray Mitchell, *A Memoir of the Reverend Robert Nesbit*, London 1858; Murray Mitchell, *In Western India: Recollections of my Early Missionary Life*, Edinburgh 1899; G. Smith, *The Life of Stephen Hislop, Missionary and Naturalist in*

missionary, Donald Mitchell, in 1823, the Scottish missionaries had concentrated on education, founding small vernacular schools, and on direct evangelism.[18] The arrival of John Wilson in Bombay in 1828 signalled a new stage in the direct intellectual attack on Hindu beliefs. Wilson set himself to expose and refute Hindu doctrines in full public debate, either in the press or in public disputations later printed in pamphlet form. The first of these took place when Ramachandra, a Brahman convert, visited Bombay in 1830 to declare and defend his new faith. Pandit Lakshmanshastri declared after much hesitation that he would defend the teaching of Hinduism on the ten incarnations of Vishnu, and Ramachandra demanded that this should be done in a public place. The debate, lasting three days, began at John Wilson's house on 21 May 1830. It was not confined to the crowds that heard it. Two editions of the debate were published in Marathi and quickly sold, and the debate aroused a great deal of interest throughout the city.[19] In February 1831, another champion of Hinduism offered himself. For six successive evenings, Morobhat Dandekar and John Wilson debated in public. Dandekar then published *The Verification of the Hindoo Religion*,[20] to which Wilson replied in his first *Exposure of the Hindoo Religion*.[21] Narayanarao, the English teacher in the Raja of Satara's school, replied to this in another pamphlet, edited by Dandekar,[22] which Wilson countered in 1834 with *A Second Exposure of the Hindoo Religion*.[23] There was considerable demand in Bombay for all these texts, and they were promptly translated into Marathi and Bengali.[24] Others of the Scottish missionaries were active in the same way. Nesbit prepared a critique of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and Stevenson a translation of the *Rgveda*. They also made the study of the vernaculars and

Central India, 1844–1863, London 1888; and *The Jubilee of Dr. Murray Mitchell*, Edinburgh 1899.

18 Details of the Scottish missionaries' educational efforts are contained in Elizabeth G. K. Hewat, *Christ and Western India*, Bombay 1950, pp. 49–54 and, by the same author, *Vision and Achievement: A History of the Foreign Missions of the Churches United in the Church of Scotland, 1796–1865*, London 1960, pp. 43–54; and in R. Hunter, *A History of the Missions of the Free Church of Scotland in India and Africa*, London 1873, pp. 212–21.

19 G. Smith, *Life of John Wilson*, pp. 62–3.

20 Morobhat Dandekar, *The Verification of the Hindoo Religion*, Bombay 1831. A copy of this work is in the British Library.

21 John Wilson, *An Exposure of the Hindoo Religion, in Reply to Moro Bhatta Dandekar*, Bombay 1832.

22 Narayanarao, *A Reply to the Rev Mr Wilson's Exposure of Hinduism*, Bombay 1834.

23 John Wilson, *A Second Exposure of the Hindoo Religion*, Bombay 1834.

24 G. Smith, *Life of John Wilson*, pp. 67–8. Murray Mitchell records that 100 copies of Wilson's first tract were sold almost at once, at the very high price of half a rupee. Murray Mitchell, *Memoir of the Reverend Robert Nesbit*, p. 121.

Sanskrit an important priority, the better to understand and refute Hindu religious writings.[25]

An area in which all missionary groups in western India were concerned was the growth of the press. The circulation of tracts formed a great part of their evangelistic agency. The Bombay Tract and Book Society had been founded in 1827. It was reorganised in 1848 under the joint presidency of Murray Mitchell and Hume, the editor of the *Dnyanodaya*, which had begun publication in 1842. Murray Mitchell wanted the Bombay Society to devote itself to the publication of cheap and attractive texts illustrating simple Christian truths. In particular, he was concerned at the extent to which Hindu writers had taken to using the press to print cheap illustrated editions of Hindu texts. He felt that the missionaries were in danger of being left behind in the battle for public attention. Murray Mitchell's drive for greater output was extremely effective. In 1855, the *Dnyanodaya* was able to report, a total of 54,207 Christian books and tracts of different kinds had been sold that year.[26]

The *Dnyanodaya* was the most important Marathi missionary periodical in western India, printed from Bombay by the American Marathi Mission. The *Dnyanodaya* expressed perfectly the worldview of early nineteenth-century Christianity described above, and to this extent the strategies of the American missionaries bore a strong resemblance to those of the Europeans.[27] Apart from essays inculcating overtly Christian beliefs, it contained articles on a wide range of subjects of an apparently secular nature. There were frequent series on aspects of world geography and natural history that were unfamiliar or misunderstood by ordinary Indians. It ran articles on recent advances in astronomy, and on the progress of medical science in the west with its ability to encompass human life in every country of the world in its understanding of the workings of the human body. A very frequent theme was the developing capacity of western science to understand and manipulate the material world for the benefit of mankind. All of

25 Besides this assault on educated religious opinion in Bombay, the Scottish missionaries continued both their educational efforts and their practice of direct popular evangelism. All undertook extensive tours, from Rajputana to Goa. They paid particular attention to the centres of pilgrimage in western India – Jejuri, Alandi, Pandharapur – in order to initiate personal discussions and to question individual pilgrims about the real benefits that they derived from the worship of idols, and to distribute tracts illustrating their arguments.

26 *Dnyanodaya*, 15 March 1855.

27 For details of the attitudes and activities of the American missionaries, see William Hazen, *A Century in India: a Historical Sketch of the Marathi Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions 1813–1913*, Bombay 1913; and R. Modak, *A short history of the American Marathi Mission*, Pune 1883 (Marathi).

these were in turn used to demonstrate the truth of the Christian ideas of a beneficent deity who had made man to occupy a special moral and intellectual position in the world, and who had created the material world for his support and enjoyment through the use of his reason. The *Dnyanodaya* emphasised that God had, in this way, created all men the same in their physical lives, and exercised the same moral government over all of them. To such a God, individual effort and virtue was infinitely more valuable than the status conferred by merely human social or religious constructs. The *Dnyanodaya* also contained a large section of correspondence from its readers in each issue that largely reflected the opinions of its editors.[28]

Missionary polemic: the ascending levels of Christian truth

The partial acceptance among Hindu reformers and radicals of the ideological framework of Christian belief, and its claims to a monopoly of secular scientific truth, was naturally shaped by the points at which basic Christian ideas about the relationship between God and the world conflicted with their equivalent in popular Hinduism. While protestant Christianity envisaged a unique Creator, existing distinct from the material and social world, popular Hinduism described a vast number of sacred beings, and a natural world still inhabited by supernatural powers and possessed of religious significance. Thus, the dichotomy between pure and impure was perceived as inherent in material objects. As Louis Dumont has argued, this formed the guiding principle in the construction of social hierarchies.[29] In Christian thought, the deity existed as the very principle of purity and as the source of moral government, and exercised the same authority over all his human

28 The *Dnyanodaya* began as a monthly paper in 1842, published from Ahmadnagar. From 1845 it was published from Bombay twice monthly until 1873, when it became a weekly. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any precise circulation figures for the paper. There are subscription lists which appear at the back of each issue, but it is hard to calculate an overall circulation from these. What they do reflect is a very wide range of subscribers, both British and Indian, missionary and administrator, Christian and Hindu. For example, the *Dnyanodaya* for 1 October 1851 listed forty-four subscribers, some of which were for one year, but twenty-five of which were for a longer period. Twenty-four of these names were Hindu, the rest British. Amongst the Hindus were 'Jothi Govind Fulmally' and Baba Padmanji, the famous Hindu reformer who was to be converted in 1854. In arguing for a wide circulation of the paper amongst the reformers, I am also relying on the frequency with which reformers themselves mention it as an influence. Baba Padmanji mentions that he used to read it at home in Belgaum, where his uncle was a subscriber, and he later took out ten subscriptions so that he could distribute the paper amongst his friends: Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, Bombay 1888 (Marathi), pp. 159–60.

29 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, University of Chicago Press 1970, chapter 2.

creatures and distinguished them from all other beings. Hindu gods, on the other hand, could commit harmful acts. The concern of the individual Hindu was to propitiate them, and in this task Brahmans or priests of other castes occupied a special position as mediators. Moreover, popular Hinduism envisaged no special moral sphere for man. Like all living beings, he was caught up in the same cycles of rebirth, and subject in the same way, to the law of *karma*. The Christian envisaged worldly life as a once and for all affair, his soul as a unique creation of God, its ultimate fate dependent upon his worldly conduct. Religious merit derived from his individual faith and conduct within the framework provided by the redemption of sin in Christ. Religious merit in Hindu thought consisted primarily in obedience to the *dharma* of a present social position, and all worldy concerns appeared ultimately only as the illusion that kept the spirit from liberation in *moksa*. Finally, the two differed in their account of the legitimation of social hierarchies and the nature of social justice. In protestant Christian theory, all men shared an original spiritual equality before God. Christianity deprecated human status derived from merely human social or religious hierarchies as compared to the merit of individual faith and virtue. This emphasis on individual merit and the concept of original human equality gave rise to a universally valid ethic for the construction of human societies, and formed their only ultimate source of legitimacy. In this way, the individual could look upon the social order as an arena for the potential realisation of the religious value of the original spiritual equality of men, whose ultimate source was an extra-worldly God. The conflict with the values of popular Hinduism here – which was to be of crucial significance for social reform ideas – lay in popular Hinduism's conception of the existing social order as an absolute fixity. Through the doctrine of *karma*, the structure of society was in itself the final realisation of a religious justice inherent in the social process. Rather than seeking to make inherent religious values a reality in the social order, the individual's attitude should be one of acceptance and a search for release from all worldy existence. The positive inhibition of social radicalism evident here, the devaluation of worldly life, and the social conservatism of Hindu thought impelled all potential social reformers beyond this framework of thought to search for a set of social and religious values that would place reform efforts at the centre of human concern.[30]

With these tensions in mind, we turn now to examine the component

30 It will be obvious that for this very schematised account I have drawn heavily on Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, Free Press, New York 1958, especially the chapter 'The Anti-Orgiastic and Ritualistic Character of Brahmanical Religiosity'.

elements of the worldview of early nineteenth-century Christianity, as they emerged in the missionary assault upon Hindu beliefs. First, there was the basic conviction of a unique Creator, the source of all purity and the absolute arbiter of human conduct. Implicit in this was the idea of a special moral sphere for man. The Hindu depiction of the divine nature depicted gods sometimes cruel, capricious, and unjust, and so left men without any ultimate spiritual guide for his worldly conduct. This was one of John Wilson's central points in his *Exposure of the Hindoo Religion*.[31] In his very popular *Letters to Indian Youth*, Murray Mitchell made the same point in the contrast with Hindu doctrines. Many Hindus, to whom he had argued the truth of the Christian faith, had replied that each society should keep to its own traditional religion, which would provide the path to spiritual fulfilment most suited to its own conditions and needs. Murray Mitchell denied this: 'It is inconceivable that God should reveal one system in Asia, and other systems, contradictory to the former, in Europe or Africa.'[32] Hinduism, moreover, had no distinct idea of a unique Creator; some Hindu ideas of the divine nature were pantheistic, some polytheistic. Sometimes the divine nature was represented as without qualities, and sometimes the qualities ascribed to it were of the most offensive kind. The *Dnyanodaya* contained repeated references to these contrasting accounts of the divine nature. It lamented the spiritual poverty of Hinduism's view, and its terrible social consequences in a variety of cruel and senseless religious practices: hookswinging in the service of the god Khandoba, the religious prostitution of *muralis* and *vaghayas* and the immorality of the Holi festival.[33] Against these ideas, the *Dnyanodaya* argued that God was pure and holy, and could in no way be pleased by such practices. It was his wish that all should love him and be happy, and not that they should inflict such tortures upon themselves.[34] This more general assertion of the nature of God, and its conflict with many Hindu

31 John Wilson, *An Exposure of the Hindoo Religion*, p. 39.

32 Murray Mitchell, *Letters to Indian Youth*, p. 87.

33 The god Khandoba, an incarnation of Shiva, was the guardian deity of the Deccan, most popular amongst the agricultural castes. His devotees practised one of the forms of worship in return for, or in the hope of granting, some request, that most outraged missionary and liberal European observers: swinging round a pole, often set up on a cart to be drawn in triumph around the temple, by means of a hook inserted into the worshipper's back. *Muralis* and *vaghayas* were religious prostitutes of all castes, whose parents dedicated them to the service of the local temple. The Holi is the festival held at the spring equinox that proved offensive to missionaries through its acceptance of public displays of obscene language and behaviour. See the *Dnyanodaya*, 15 January 1844, for an essay on the practice of hookswinging, and 15 May 1849, for a prize essay written by a Hindu on the iniquities of the Holi festival.

34 *Dnyanodaya*, 15 January 1844.

practices, was polemically far more effective than would have been a crude emphasis on specific points of Christian doctrine.

Another major element in the Christian account of the moral framework of man's relations with God and his fellow men was to be adopted by social reformers. This consisted in the idea of an original, pre-social human equality before God, and an account of human merit in society which valued individual effort above the status conferred by merely human hierarchies. This classic opposition between subjective and ascriptive values was the perspective from which the main missionary attack on caste was launched, and the point made that Hindu caste operated to maintain the religious pre-eminence of Brahmans. Here again, the effectiveness of missionary criticism, in influencing potential social reformers, lay in its ability to present an account of the relations between God and man which seemed to transcend all specific religious confessions. This account seemed to represent the bare essentials of universal religious and moral truth, and to appear as a self-sufficient framework of ideas, that might be used in the relief of India's apparent material and social difficulties.

This opposition between ascriptive and subjective values resolved itself into four main arguments as it was presented in missionary thought, of which three concern us most directly. The first was the idea that God had created all men in a basic spiritual equality. Secondly, missionaries argued that religious merit or social status should be a function of individual conduct, and not ascribed by birth, or by a predetermined system of hierarchical values. Associated with this second statement was invariably a critique of the social consequences of the application of ascriptive values, in particular upon women and the lower castes. The third argument asserted that the system of ascriptive values, so pre-eminently represented in caste, had no origins in the divine intention, but represented the carefully constructed edifice of Brahman self-interest. All three arguments implied an exhilarating new degree of individual freedom and responsibility in worldly life for the potential social reformer. They asserted that each individual should reap what he had sown, and contrasted this with what they portrayed as the more socially conservative Hindu emphasis on *karma*. The fourth argument was that atonement for sin was not to be found in the performance of external observances, but in individual virtue and the redemptive power of Christ. This last argument represented the level at which the ideological framework of Christian belief merged into the Christian confession itself.

The idea of a basic spiritual equality among men formed a constant theme in the correspondence of the *Dnyanodaya*. A good example

occurred in September 1842, in one of its very first issues, when it reprinted an extract from the *Prabhakar* newspaper, then edited by the leading social and religious reformers Bal Shastri Jambhekar and Bhau Mahajan. The article consisted of a letter to the *Prabhakar* criticising the writer of a letter who had argued that faithful Hindus should not send their children to learn English. The reason was that scholars at the Elphinstone Institution and those taught English by the missionaries soon became disillusioned with their own religion. They became convinced that the Christian religion offered, if not absolute religious truth, at least the most socially beneficial account of the relations between God and man. They were also persuaded that there were no natural divisions between men, such as that of caste, but only the physical difference between men and women. The editor of the *Dnyanodaya* quoted the rejoinder to this letter with intense approval. The correspondent, who signed himself 'An Elphinstone Scholar' complained that whenever anyone criticised Hinduism, Hindus themselves automatically assumed that they had converted to Christianity. But, he argued, there was no inherent connection between these obvious truths of human existence and the specific language and confession of Christianity. English was only a language; it had no connection with any religion. Why did the orthodox not accuse reformers of having converted to Islam? There was as much logical connection between that religion and these fundamental principles of man's spiritual and moral condition as there was with Christianity. In any case, he argued, it was quite true that there were not natural divisions between men except for that between the sexes. Here, in typical reformist fashion, he drew on the obvious 'facts' of God's creation to argue his case for the dismantling of the elaborate social constructs that dominated Indian life:

> See, when God made the earth, he made divisions between birds, beasts and men. If he had intended such distinctions amongst men themselves, why did he not make them obvious . . . giving Brahmans one extra mouth, or Kshatriyas two extra hands, or Shudras extra feet? But wherever you see men, they have two hands, two feet, two eyes, two ears, one nose and one mouth, whatever their kind or country. Then God could not have had it in mind to create many castes among men. And the system of caste, that is only practised in India, is caused by the Brahmans to maintain their superiority.[35]

From the idea of original spiritual equality, missionary Christianity moved to the conclusion that religious merit, in so far as it rested in human hands at all, derived from individual virtue. One of the many places in which this was set out was in the *Dnyanodaya* of 1 August

35 ibid., 1 September 1842.

1845. A native catechist described his disputation with a *patil* in a village just outside Pune, who had tried to prevent him from sleeping in the village *chavadi* for the night on the grounds that as a Christian he mixed freely with the lower castes:

I explained to him and to many others present that there is in fact no distinction of caste, and that there is no impurity contracted in eating or drinking from any other person's hands. I then asked them: 'How is it according to your shastras? To a good honest pious Mahar will God say, you are a Mahar and therefore you must not come near me? And to a wicked Brahman, will God say, you are a Brahman, no matter how wicked you are, come and remain with me? No, on the contrary, in the sight of God, there is only one distinction – that of righteous and wicked.'

The *Dnyanodaya* frequently stressed the social benefits that would follow from the rejection of ascriptive values. An article of 15 November 1848 pointed out the differences between Hindu and western societies, and gave a long list of examples of eminent people in Europe and America who had risen to greatness from very humble origins, to the great advantage of the community. The social groups most disadvantaged by the ascription of social roles in conventional Hindu society formed a special subject of concern in missionary polemic. The refusal of the British government to take a firmer stand on the human rights of the lower castes formed a constant subject of complaint. A typical example occurred in 1851, when the Board of Education, after much heart-searching, had decided that it could not admit Mahar boys to government schools. The *Dnyanodaya* protested bitterly against this deference to a set of social rules that took no account of individual qualities.[36]

A similar logic was evident in the attitudes of low caste converts to Christianity. In 1855, there was a spate of letters to the *Dnyanodaya* describing the sufferings of the low castes in Hinduism. The most striking of these appeared on 15 March 1855, and combined this admiration for Christianity's regard for human equality with an account of the historical evolution of caste dating from the Brahman conquest at

36 This case formed the subject of a long correspondence in the records of the Bombay government. Another similar case occurred in 1856, when a Mahar boy was refused admission to the government school at Dharwar. This correspondence is summarised in the Report of the Director of Public Instruction to the Department of Education for 1856/57, pp. 88–93. The *Dnyanodaya* commented on the refusal of Mang and Mahar children: 'If it is thought that the natives after receiving all the advantages of education have not yet learned the principles of kindness and mercy towards the despised Mahars and Mangs, then we would ask of what use are all the Government schools which have been established hitherto?' *Dnyanodaya*, 15 February 1858. For a complete account of the dispute, see A. J. Roberts, 'Education and Society in the Bombay Presidency, 1840–1858', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London University, 1974, pp. 163–78.

the Aryan invasions. This strikingly foreshadowed Phule's location of the struggle of the low castes within the historical perspective of Brahman conquest; and an ideological framework for social reconstruction taken indirectly from missionary Christianity. The letter began with the origins of low caste social disabilities. The Mahars and Mangs had represented the most powerful social groups in India at the time of the Aryan invasions. In order to subdue them the more effectively the conquerors arranged for their social isolation in the organisation of caste, and from that time their sufferings had begun. Now, the writer went on, some young Hindu reformers were regretting the sins of their ancestors, realising that the low castes were human after all. But for any real appreciation of human spiritual and social equality, Christian values stood foremost.

The social condition of women formed another major source of concern in missionary polemic. The prohibition of widow remarriage, the disinclination towards the education of women, and the practice of child marriage formed the foci of criticism. The fundamental principle behind these complaints did not concern actual material hardship, although extreme social practices did give rise to very harsh criticism. It concerned instead the denial to women of any social value or status as individuals outside their ascribed social roles as wives, mothers, or daughters. The origin of this circumscription of their development as individuals lay in the conviction of the moral weakness of women. Missionary arguments also projected a radical change in the relations between men and women in marriage, arguing for a closer union based on individual compatibility and companionship, rather than a relationship which consisted largely in the formal fulfilment of the roles of husband and wife. These arguments were exemplified in an address given by the American missionary, the Reverend Ballantine, to the Ahmadnagar Debating Society in October 1855. This society had been founded by the American missionaries as a means of promoting discussion and criticism of Hindu social practices in the smaller towns and villages around Ahmadnagar.[37]

The third argument, into which the opposition between ascriptive and subjective values resolved itself, concerned the role of Brahmans in constructing and maintaining caste as an instrument of their own self-interest. The criticism of Brahmans as a social group was, of course, a familiar theme in the social reform literature of the period. However, it is necessary to distinguish between missionary arguments, from which radicals like Phule tended to draw inspiration, and the

37 *Dnyanodaya*, 15 October 1855.

arguments of moderate and high caste social reformers, who complained rather that Brahmans had failed in their natural task of social leadership. Missionary polemic laid a far greater emphasis on the idea of a deliberate Brahman conspiracy to enjoy social privileges with as little effort as possible. More moderate reform writers tended, on the other hand, to regard them as the victims of their own weakness. The missionary argument was neatly summarised in the Scottish missionary Robert Nesbit's pamphlet, written for the Bombay Tract and Book Society in 1834, entitled *The Brahman's Claims*. Nesbit's technique lay in comparing the shastric statements of Brahmanic privilege and power with their real human weakness in common with all God's other creatures. He did not press the idea of a conscious Brahman conspiracy passed on from one generation to the next. He certainly suggested, nevertheless, that Brahmans had written the books upon which their intensely privileged position was based, and that this had involved a considerable degree of falsification which had gone unchallenged merely because of the ignorance of Hindus generally. These anti-Brahman ideas, reinforced by the violent anti-clericalism of European religious radicalism, were to prove a powerful influence on the development of Phule's ideas.

The next major element in the ideological framework, within which missionary polemic presented Christian doctrine, concerned the presentation of the natural world and the material universe. This ideological framework was lent objective conviction by its linkage, in missionary polemic, with the discovery of apparently irrefutable truths about the material universe. It also possessed enormous attractions in its view of the possibilities for material benefit and self-determination in human society that it implied. It should be emphasised here that this is not simply to argue that science in early nineteenth-century Europe had developed a greater accuracy in its account of the material world than was to be found in Hindu writings. The acceptance among Hindu reformers and radicals of current ideas about the relationship between science and religion never reflected merely a belief in their superior accuracy. For moderate reformers, concerned with India's apparent material and social disadvantages, what was important was the projection of man's ability to use his secular reason to understand and exploit the material world for his own benefit. Radicals like Phule, on the other hand, whose concern lay rather in the struggle for internal social justice, in the dismantling of social and religious hierarchies, and the provision of a basis of legitimacy for reformed values, tended to use the missionary presentation of these scientific ideas for much the same polemical purposes as missionaries themselves.

Much missionary material was drawn from works of natural theology that were written in the eighteenth century. The *Dnyanodaya* carried translations from Addison's *Spectator* on natural theology and the works of creation.[38] Other popular works on the natural sciences were William Paley's *Natural Theology*, which formed an important part of the curriculum of the Scottish Free Church Institution in Bombay, and M. Gallaudet's *A Youth's Book of Natural Theology*, which was translated into Marathi in 1850 and serialised in the *Dnyanodaya*.[39] The arguments of natural theology were very much in line with missionary strategies of leading Hindus in to a properly Christian idea of the Creator from the evidences of his creation.

Missionary Christianity's use of arguments about the material world consisted of several stages. The first concerned the fundamental principle of the expulsion of the sacred from the natural world: the assertion that neither the material universe nor natural objects contained divine powers or magical properties. This ran contrary to quite central areas of popular Hindu belief and social practice: the endowment of natural phenomena, such as the movements of the planets, with a magical significance in human affairs; and, even more importantly, the construction of the social distinctions of caste upon the belief of a purity or pollution inherent in material objects. Christianity presented a material world in which the natural properties of things had no such social or religious significance for man. The only significance of material objects for human society lay in their usefulness for man's support and comfort.

This was a reflection of the intentions of God, who had created the world for man's support and enjoyment. This contrast of attitudes was exemplified in a letter written to the *Dnyanodaya* on 1 March 1845, from a Mahar convert to Christianity. He related how he had visited a village near Ahmadnagar with one of the American missionaries, and had drawn water for him from the village well. Subsequently, he heard that the villagers had purified it.

> Hearing that they had purified the well, you will probably think that some rubbish had got into it, and that they had cleaned it all out and made it fit for human consumption. Not at all. They brought along cow's urine and poured it in. It was not even that they added just a little; they poured in as much as they could lay their hands on. So you can judge for yourself how pure the water of that well was – ugh! How much more filthy must it have become after they had filled it up with excrement! God created water on this earth for the use of all men and creatures, and even if thousands of Mahars and Mangs touched it,

38 See, for example, ibid., 15 June 1850.

39 See the account of his education at the Scottish Mission's Institution in Bombay in Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, pp. 152–3.

then still neither its colour nor its properties would change; it would stay just as it is. But the water really was polluted when they put urine and other filthy things in it!

This led on to the second argument, the idea of a Creator removed from his physical creation. It was only by this process of desacralising nature that the idea of the divine could assume a new form. The disassociation of God from the physical world freed him to become the omnipotent Creator, the source of all moral and spiritual government of Christian ideology. This progression was beautifully illustrated in the Scottish missionary Robert Nesbit's account of his standard method of confronting idol-worshippers on his tours of Hindu centres of pilgrimage. He recounted the following conversation at the village of Khardi in the Deccan:

Hindu: A form is necessary to worship, because God is invisible.
Missionary: Well, after you get the form, do you worship it or something else? Do you worship the stone?
Hindu: We worship the god that is brought into the stone.
Missionary: Do you see that god?
Hindu: No.
Missionary: Well, then, what do you gain by the stone? What is the use of it? God is invisible without it. If you wish a help to the worship of God, look abroad upon the earth and the sky. These exhibit his works; and from the works you may know 'the eternal power and Godhead' of Him that worketh.[40]

This progression of ideas was to be repeated almost exactly in Phule's first attack on orthodox religious values.

The third argument consisted in the idea of the natural world itself that was projected: in its beauty and harmony, accessible to man's reason and available for his support, testimony to the power and benevolence of the divine nature. It contrasted the enlightened happiness of man's material life in Christian societies with the ignorance and fear that kept Hindus from a realisation of their real freedom.

In 1846, the *Dnyanodaya* announced the publication of a new native almanac. This would take the place of the traditional almanac prepared by Hindu astrologers. The older almanac predicted the events of the year from the movements of the planets, so that Hindus could perform ceremonies at auspicious times and present offerings to the gods to avert the evil predicted from the appearance of comets, meteors, or eclipses. The *Dnyanodaya* explained that these beliefs were common in all countries where the workings of the solar system were not properly understood. On the other hand;

40 Murray Mitchell, *A Memoir of Robert Nesbit*, pp. 386–7.

Among the English and other enlightened nations, the science of astronomy has been much cultivated, and the causes of the curious phenomena of the heavens are generally understood. Hence, they no longer regard these things as omens either of good or ill. And their pity is excited when they see how much the ignorant and superstitious are troubled by these appearances.[41]

The new Marathi almanac contained an account of the solar system, the causes of eclipses, the theories of tides, ways of determining the time of sunrise and sunset, and the calculation of latitude and longitude. It also held more general information about the religious systems of the world, the judicial systems of western India, government institutions, and rules for the appointment of government officers. Published every year, the almanac emphasised that civilised man could understand the material universe, plan his activities on the basis of his own interest and comfort, and trust his own labour and judgement, rather than looking to the movements of the stars.

Missionary polemic and the attack on legitimacy

Besides the immense appeal of the ideological framework of Christian belief, missionary Christianity derived great polemical advantages from the unspoken assumptions upon which the debates were conducted. In almost all of the public exchanges between missionaries, reformers, and the orthodox, the criteria for religious rectitude that were applied to the relationship between religious texts, and current practices and beliefs, were drawn from an essentially Christian model.

The important religious texts of Hinduism, from the Vedas and the Upanishads to the numerous versions of the *puranas*, did of course play a part in underpinning contemporary religious practices. However, this process of legitimation did not consist, as it did in Christianity, of a fairly consistent and comprehensive set of moral norms and prohibitions, which were to be taken to heart by every member of the faithful, and translated into practice in everyday life. As many missionary polemicists pointed out, indeed, most Hindus were unaware even of the content of the most sacred of Hindu writings. Their familiarity with the puranic tales of popular Hinduism was limited to what they could gather from local oral traditions.[42] It was not so much the content of Hindu religious writings that were important in the legitimation of social hierarchies. The religious division of social groups in caste was referred to different levels of religious purity, and one sign of this purity was access to the most sacred religious texts. It was an inherent part of

41 *Dnyanodaya*, 1 October 1846.

42 See Baba Padmanji's account of his early Hindu beliefs, pp. 114–15.

Brahman religious privilege to be able to repeat parts of the Vedas; a Brahman's contact with the Vedas, spoken by Brahman himself, represented an important part of his religious power over lower castes which were denied such access.[43] Although the very structural divisions between Brahmans and other castes were outlined and justified in Hindu religious texts, the most detailed prescriptions for caste divisions were not – as missionary polemicists were quick to point out – contained in Hinduism's oldest and most sacred writings. The social role of the latter, in maintaining and legitimating the hierarchies of caste, referred less, then, to their actual contents, and more to the effects of differential access to them, in reinforcing the religious charisma of Brahmans themselves.

The other important source of legitimacy for religious hierarchies and popular beliefs consisted in the force of literal social prescription. No complaint was repeated more often by missionaries and social reformers than that Hindus feared above all to depart from the religion of their fathers. Missionaries at least found this lack of an individual or 'rational' argument for them infuriating and incomprehensible.[44] This mode of justification contained an inherent vulnerability, which missionaries did their best to exploit. The importance of prescription in popular Hinduism was almost certainly reinforced in the impression of the eternal religious consistency of Hindu belief stretching back into antiquity. This was conveyed by the continuing viability of very old religious texts in upholding nineteenth-century systems of religious authority. However, as we have seen, this referred more to the effects of differential access than to the injunctions of their contents; indeed, many of these injunctions would have constituted the most flagrant breaches of nineteenth-century beliefs. The survival of very old texts seemed, therefore, to guarantee a consistency in religious practice which it never in fact produced. This resulted in the anomaly in popular Hinduism of a great faith in the normative power of prescription in a religious tradition that contained radical and relatively recent innovations.

Missionary polemic sought to exploit internal tensions such as these. It also tried to impose upon the conduct of the debates criteria that were drawn from Christian models of legitimation, rather than Hindu. Missionaries asserted that many contemporary practices and beliefs

43 Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, p. 155.

44 Murray Mitchell, for example, complained that on his preaching tours in western India, one of the arguments most frequently advanced in defence of idol worship was 'Our forefathers established this worship. They were far wiser than we. How dare we set the worship aside?' Murray Mitchell, *In Western India*, p. 84.

should be abandoned because they had no scriptural authority. They argued that Hinduism as a religion had failed in its duty to its followers by neglecting to inform them about its most sacred texts. The translation and publication of Hindu religious texts, and the publication of information about ancient Hindu society and the changes that its social structure and religious practices had undergone since Vedic times, also formed a very important part of missionary strategy. Here, missionary polemicists were able to draw on and produce popularised versions of the voluminous research of European scholars. Through this, they tried to exploit popular Hinduism's faith in prescription by pointing out that many of its central tenets represented comparatively recent innovations. Since Vedic times these had changed beyond all recognition. Missionary writers attempted to undermine the legitimation of Brahman superiority through differential access to sacred texts by the large-scale printing and circulation of the texts themselves. They emphasised the apparent discrepancy between the power of the texts in maintaining the mystique of Brahmanhood, and their actual contents. These consisted largely of descriptions of the worship of the elements, and seemed to bear very little connection with nineteenth-century popular Hinduism. Indeed, it was a common complaint among radicals and converts that their first reading of Marathi translations of some parts of the Vedas had been a tremendous anti-climax. After the pre-eminence that they had enjoyed in traditional religious life, their actual contents came as a great disappointment.[45] Missionary polemicists also argued a discrepancy between these texts and contemporary religious practices, applying an essentially Christian model of what their relation should be.

The idea that Hinduism had failed its believers in not providing them with a consistent and intelligible religious text that would guide them in their everyday lives formed a persistent criticism. Associated with it was always the idea that Brahmans perpetuated this state of affairs themselves in order to keep the real weakness of the religious texts, upon which their authority was supposedly founded, hidden from ordinary Hindus. John Wilson made precisely this point in the debates of the early 1830s, arguing that Hindus 'are thus, in a great degree, prevented from thinking for themselves'.[46] The *Dnyanodaya* made the same point repeatedly. In an article of 1 November 1854, it asserted that 'the millions of Hindus in India, since for the most part they do not understand Sanskrit, are ignorant of their religion and like poor fools are practising they know not what'. This projection of a religious text,

45 This was certainly Baba Padmanji's experience: see p. 115.

46 John Wilson, *A Second Exposure of the Hindoo Religion*, pp. 12–13.

available to all for the guidance of their practical lives, was to have a great effect on reformist and radical views of the proper function of a religious text amongst the community of believers. Radicals like Phule came to see in the traditional functioning of Hindu sacred texts a source of social control, the evidence of a Brahman conspiracy to defraud ordinary Hindus. They demanded a text that, after the Christian model, would be available to all and act as a guide for conduct in everyday life.

This shift was reflected in a remarkable letter written to the *Dnyanodaya* by a 14-year-old girl of the Mang caste who was a pupil at Phule's school for the education of untouchable children. The letter lamented the lack of a religious text for the use of untouchable castes:

> The Brahmans, who are very fond of their creature comforts, say that the Vedas belong exclusively to them. So it is clear that we ourselves have no religious book. If the Vedas are for the Brahmans, then they should conduct their behaviour according to them. If we are not free to look at any religious book at all, then is it not clear that we are deprived of religion![47]

Missionary polemicists also hoped that their strategy of publishing religious texts in translation, of serialising extracts from these in missionary periodicals and of bringing out a Bombay Tract and Book Society pamphlet, *What is in the Veda*, would exploit this disjunction between religious content and religious significance, and would demonstrate the historical inconsistencies in the evolution of Hindu religious beliefs.[48] The *Dnyanodaya* of 1 November 1845 advised its readers of the benefits of each individual's being able to take hold of a copy of the Vedas in his hand and read them for himself so that he could see what they actually contained. It added that copies could be procured cheaply from Colonel Stevenson in Pune. In his *Letters to Indian Youth*, Murray Mitchell put forward what he clearly hoped would be the effect of this individual reading: 'Hindus speak of the Vedas as the authoritative representation of Hinduism; but none can be more astonished at the religion of the Vedas than the Hindus must be themselves.'[49]

Missionary propaganda also attempted to undermine the legitimacy of traditional practices by showing that they were quite recent innovations, running counter to the ancient beliefs of Vedic society. John Wilson's book, *India Three Thousand Years Ago*, published in 1858, set out to describe the origins of the Aryan people, their arrival in the sub-continent and their conflicts with the indigenous tribes; the nature

47 *Dnyanodaya*, 15 February 1855.
48 This was written by Baba Padmanji, and published in 1880.
49 Murray Mitchell, *Letters to Indian Youth*, p. 110.

of their customs and their religious beliefs. As well as showing the historical inconsistencies of Hindu religion, Wilson's writings and their popularisation and serialisation in missionary periodicals provided additional ammunition for radicals like Phule in the very proposition of the alien origins of the higher castes in India.

Wilson began by describing the origins of the Aryan races, their subjugation of the tribes that they found in the sub-continent and the beginnings of Aryan culture in India. Quoting the Sanskrit scholar H. H. Wilson, he described how the indigenous tribes harassed the Aryans and attempted to disrupt their religious practices. The terms *dasya*, *rakshas*, *ugras*, *pishchas*, *asura*, *yakshas*, *shigravas*, and *kikatas*, which recurred so frequently in the early Sanskrit texts, all referred to the indigenous tribes of India who resented the presence of the Aryans and attempted to spoil their religious rites.[50] Wilson then went on to argue that 'caste' was never part of the social system of ancient India. The Brahmans were represented in the Vedas merely as a profession, not a caste. It was possible to trace their rise as a matter of group ambition: 'His study and learning gradually increased his influence, and he was constituted an adviser and counsellor. His supposed peculiar access to the gods gave him a peculiar sanctity. He became a legislator, and in this capacity, he soon made himself a god upon earth.'[51]

The term *Kshatriya* had originally possessed no connotations of caste, but had a variety of meanings in the Vedas. Here again, Phule was to find material for his own interpretation. Wilson described how

> the term Kshatriya, applied by the sastras or Law Book to the second or warrior class in the Hindu community, is used in the vedas only as a denominative of a party possessed of *kshatra*, or power. In this sense, it is applied to the gods, as to Indra and Varuna. In the vedas, the word *kshetrapati*, 'the owner of a field', is the name of a person possessing landed property; and the name *kashatrapati*, 'the possessor of power', seems to have been applicable to any party exercising authority of any kind or extent. *Kshatriya* is the equivalent of *Kshatrapati*.[52]

Neither did the religious beliefs and practices of nineteenth-century Hinduism have any greater connection with Vedic religion. The practice of *sati* and of infant marriage were unknown in Vedic society; women 'suffered from nothing like the exclusion and confinement of modern times'.[53] Finally, the hierarchies of caste and the idea of ritual pollution were nowhere to be found in Vedic society. Wilson expressed the hope that this information 'may aid some timid souls in dealing with

50 John Wilson, *India Three Thousand Years Ago*, Bombay 1858, pp. 19–21.
51 ibid., p. 47. 52 ibid., p. 52. 53 ibid., p. 69.

caste, that heavy and galling, and degrading yoke, which cannot too soon be voluntarily wrenched by the natives from their own necks'.[54]

European religious radicalism in mid-nineteenth-century western India

Beside the detailed and extensive evidence for the worldview of missionary Christianity, information about the circulation of radical ideas in religion from Europe is difficult to find. There is enough evidence, however, to indicate their importance in the shaping of reform opinion. It is possible to distinguish three sets of ideas. These were taken from the radical critics of established religion associated with the French Enlightenment, and from the radicalism in political thought in France and England, in the three decades after the French Revolution of 1789. First, there was the deist attack on revealed religion, and the assertion that none of the world's religions contained a direct revelation from God. The revealed religions were usually the product of men and, in their organised form, the instrument of delusion, if not of actual oppression. In place of revealed religions, with their burdensome ritual and obedience to arbitrary religious texts, deist thinkers substituted the simple idea of a single Creator who was to be worshipped the same by all men. This was consistent with man's reason, which told him of the existence of the Creator, from the evidence of the world around him. Associated with this idea of the Creator in European deism was a view of ethics and moral conduct based on the simple idea of human reciprocity. The foundation of all morality was provided by man's need for self-preservation. Moral good consisted in whatever preserved and ameliorated the condition of mankind; and evil, whatever tended to its destruction and harm. Third, there was the concern with the individual that marked the religious and political radicalism of the late eighteenth century. Eighteenth-century radicals such as Thomas Paine had emphasised the natural rights of the individual as determining the legitimacy of the authority imposed upon him in society. They put forward the idea that every individual should be able to enjoy his own opinions in religious and political matters, and subject traditional institutions to free discussion and criticism.[55]

54 ibid., p. 61. Another good example of this missionary attempt to exploit the differences between Vedic beliefs and those of nineteenth-century Hinduism was a course of lectures on the Vedas given by the missionary Reverend A. White, reported in the *Dnyanodaya*, 1 August 1861. White described how the gods of the Vedas performed animal sacrifices, drank intoxicating substances, quarrelled, and concerned themselves only with their own selfish desires.

55 This is a very broad summary, but it does represent the most common arguments of the religious and political radicals of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century

In *Arunodaya*, his autobiography, the convert Baba Padmanji described how widely deist criticisms of revealed religion were spread in western-educated circles in the mid-century. Padmanji, born in 1831 in Belgaum in a family of the Kasar caste,[56] the son of a Public Works Department supervisor, was educated at the high school of the London Mission Society in Belgaum, then went to Bombay to the Free Church of Scotland's Institution. There, he came under the influence of the famous convert Narayan Sheshadri.[57] After several years of intellectual and spiritual turmoil, he was baptised in 1854. In his baptismal address, describing the background to his conversion, he told his audience:

> I regularly carried on my study of the Christian religion. I saw the evidence that there was for it, and read the opinions of the European atheists against it, and also read the answers given to them by the former. The names of the anti-Christian books that I read were: the books of Tom Paine, the Free Thinkers Magazine, the Critical Review, Volney, Gibbon and Hume, and a book by a Parsi in Bombay.[58]

The works of Voltaire were also discussed in the Free Church Institution.[59] Padmanji became a member of the theistic society, the Paramahansa Mandali, before his conversion, and recorded how he had read a paper to the society one evening, when 'some learned group, having come down from Pune, put forward opinions of an atheistical kind while my paper was being discussed'. The president of the society, Ramachandra Balakrshna Jayakar, himself later shocked the more conventional members of the society by joining the atheist group in Pune, although he claimed that he had only done so for the sake of the fascinating discussions that they held.[60] A letter from Padmanji to the

France and England. What is important is not so much the intellectual difference between individual radicals, but the revolutionary novelty of the ideas themselves in an intellectual and religious tradition that held firmly to the idea of revelation in religion and lacked any strong idea of individual natural rights.

56 Kasars were a caste of braziers.

57 The Brahman convert Narayan Sheshadri was the elder brother of Sripat Sheshadri, at the centre of the famous controversy in Bombay concerning the readmission of the boy to the caste after he had lived with his convert brother. For an account of the dispute, which split Brahman opinion in Bombay, see Murray Mitchell, *In Western India*, pp. 105–11.

58 Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, pp. 373–4.

59 ibid., p. 256.

60 ibid., pp. 193–4. Ramachandra Balakrshna Jayakar, to whom Phule dedicated his *Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, Bombay 1869 (Marathi), was an Assistant Commissioner of the Customs and a Justice of the Peace. He became president of the Paramahansa Mandali when he left the Customs Department and became Daftardar to a Mr Spooner.

Dnyanprakash also described the growth of radical ideas in religion, and Padmanji's own dismay at the decline in religious faith:

By means of knowledge, many Hindus' faith in their religion has left them. They have rejected caste divisions and the worship of idols. It is openly said that Rama, Krshna and other avatars were merely human beings. How can one call these people Hindu any longer? I think that they did the right thing. But I do not understand what will become of people who won't accept Hindu, or Christian or any other religion; to them, all their education, learning, morals and good behaviour, have all become like poison. Some of them say that there is one God, and it is enough to worship him. Others say, let us eat, drink and be merry, then when we die, that is the end.[61]

Padmanji's friend, Kasam Mahadmadji, also a member of the Paramahansa Mandali and later baptised, recalled his experience of deist and atheist ideas in the 1840s and 1850s in a letter to Padmanji:

When we were at school, reformist groups in Pune and Bombay used to print and send us selected passages of atheist opinions from the books of the famous foreign atheists Tom Paine and Voltaire; and in Pune, some of the disciples of Professor Green[62] used to meet us in secret and tell us that there was no author of the universe, and that rules about ethics are observed only for the convenient arrangement of society.

Though Mahamadji and his friends never became outright atheists, they still thought that 'Parameshvara is the author of the universe, and he has not given us any shastra, but our own reason is enough for us to understand all our duties.'[63] Another friend of Padmanji's, Narayan Raghunath, who was at the Robert Money Institution in Bombay, recalled how two members of the Paramahansa Mandali had tried to destroy his regard for Christian doctrines by telling him that 'the Bible was full of absurdities, errors and immoralities. As I used to take infinite delight in reading books written by the most celebrated infidel writers of England and Europe, as well as those written in defence of the Christian religion, these two brothers did not succeed in converting me to their views.'[64]

The 'book by a Parsi in Bombay' mentioned by Padmanji was almost certainly the *Talim-i-Zartosht*, 'The Doctrine of Zoroaster in the Gujurathi Language for the Instruction of Parsi Youth'. A review of this long book of 268 pages appeared in the *Bombay United Services Gazette*, a copy of which was sent by John Wilson to Dr Brunton, the Convenor of the Scottish General Assembly's Convention on

61 ibid., p. 350.
62 It is possible that this may be the same Green with whom the radical Dadoba Pandurang lived in Surat, since both were teachers and held strong deist and radical beliefs. See pp. 97–8.
63 Reprinted in Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, pp. 363–4. 64 ibid., p. 407.

Missions.[65] This book, said by its author to have been prepared at the request of the Parsi Panchayet for the refutation of John Wilson's attack on the *Vendidad*,[66] shows how European religious radicalism had been adopted as an important means of refuting Christian attacks amongst Parsis as well as Hindus. According to the review, the book used a lot of material from Gibbon and from Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*. Like European religious radicals, the book emphasised the internal inconsistencies of Christian doctrine. It argued that the recent convert Dhunjibhoy Nowrojee was guilty of a breach of the Ten Commandments, and taunted him with not having performed miracles in support of his new creed, as the sixteenth chapter of the book of Mark led one to expect. It quoted a burlesque on the Lord's Prayer by Voltaire. Very significantly, the book also quoted Voltaire's claim that some miracles in the Roman Catholic tradition had led to the worship of idols.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the structure and content of protestant missionary polemic. It has highlighted the points at which missionaries attacked Hindu religious ideas. Missionaries assumed that these attacks were extremely effective in undermining the public legitimacy of existing Hindu institutions and beliefs, and in providing many of the arguments that Hindu reformers and radicals were to use. However, this influence was never a direct one, and seldom that which the missionaries intended. Their arguments were often at their most effective precisely in conjunction with the ideas of European religious radicals – ideas which were anathema to any right-thinking Christian. Missionary labours helped bring into being a small but vocal group of Hindu social reformers. As we shall see in the next chapter, these were to combine a hostility to many existing Hindu institutions and values, with deist ideas in religion, and a belief in western styles of education as offering the best hope for secular social and economic progress in India. Reformers selected from a wide variety of non-Hindu ideas, both Christian and non-Christian, to form their own independent critique of Hindu society. To this extent, the end result of missionary efforts was

65 John Wilson to the Reverend Dr Brunton, Bombay, 28 August 1840, National Library of Scotland, MSS vol. 7532(1), fol. 68–68v.

66 John Wilson, *Lecture on the Vendidad Sade of the Parsis, delivered at Bombay on 19th and 26th June 1883*, American Mission Press, Bombay 1883. Wilson in turn refuted this book with *The Parsi Religion, as contained in the Zand Avasta, and Propagated and defined by the Zoroastrians of India and Persia, unfolded, refuted and contrasted with Christianity*, Bombay 1843.

often very different from the grateful and uncritical acceptance of Christian truths for which they had originally hoped.

There was, however, another level on which missionary propaganda was extremely successful. This success did not consist of any overt acceptance by all Hindus of any of the tenets of Christianity that were prominent in missionary writings. The missionaries' success lay in conveying in their arguments an implicit idea of the proper relationships between scriptural writings, religious hierarchy, and the individual believer. This idea was drawn from these relationships within Christian belief. The proper task of a religion given to man by God was to provide the divine revelation as a single corpus of religious writings. This was to be available to all believers equally, and should provide for them an authoritative guide for their spiritual lives. Hindu reformers in western India were never to agree on the corpus of religious writing that might be used to fulfil this role within a reformed Hinduism. Indeed, the whole issue of whether God had sent a specific revelation to man remained a matter of dispute. Some reformers took the position that no such revelation had been given, and argued that the evidence of man's senses were all that he needed to know of the existence and nature of God. However, reformers of almost every shade of opinion were to accept as a basic premise that Hinduism was unsatisfactory because it denied to a large proportion of its believers access to writings that were asserted to be the product of divine revelation. These writings were also seen as unsuitable for the spiritual guidance of believers in the nineteenth century. If any body of scriptures was to be put forward as a divine revelation for Hindus, then these should serve as a guide, and should be available to all.

It was here that protestant propaganda scored its most notable polemical triumph. Prominent religious reformers and radicals were to accept, as their own, what was in fact a Christian model of the proper relationship between scripture, hierarchy, and the individual believer. This triumph was not confined to western India alone. Indeed, it marked most of the encounters between protestant missionaries and Hindus, where these threw up a strong movement for religious reform. An important feature of the most prominent of these movements – the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal, and the Arya Samaj in northern India – was precisely this same acceptance of an implicitly Christian model of these relationships. An analysis of this feature would contribute to our understanding both of the ideological origins of what these movements saw as their major tasks, and of the awkwardness that attended many of their efforts. Both movements devoted enormous effort to the search for a corpus of scriptural writings that would not only stand as a divine

revelation, but would provide everyday spiritual guidance for individual believers, whilst not departing too obviously from existing Hindu practices. This attempt to find Hindu religious writings that could be successfully 'democratised' also helps to explain the ideological unease obvious amongst the leadership of both movements. The task of changing both the role of Hindu scriptural materials, and their existing relationship with Hindu religious hierarchies, and of making these afresh in the image of their Christian equivalents, would always be fraught with difficulty and tension.

4
The growth of religious reform opinion in western India

Introduction

The third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence in western India of a small, but well-organised and highly articulate body of reformers. They conceived it as their task to investigate the causes of the apparent backwardness, disorganisation, and impoverishment of Hindu society, and to take the lead in eradicating the features which had caused its decline. In this chapter, we will look at some examples of such reform opinion amongst the western-educated. This will both illustrate the orgins and very wide currency of reform ideas, and provide a contrast to Phule's employment of similar arguments to construct a much more radical critique of Hindu institutions and values. For our examples we will take the newspapers started by the prominent reformer and Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Elphinstone College, Bal Shastri Jambhekar; the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha, the 'Society for the Spread of Knowledge', founded in 1848 by a group of reformers and students at Elphinstone College; and the newspapers for the theistic society, the Paramahansa Mandali, founded by Dadoba Pandurang, who succeeded Jambhekar in Bombay as the director of the Normal Class. The Bombay membership of this society was largely drawn from students of the Elphinstone College, the Free Church Institution, and the Robert Money School.

Moderate social reformers shared, then, an acceptance of many of the basic elements of the religious and scientific worldview associated with the Raj.[1] They saw in their application to Indian society the main hope for its social enlightenment and its material happiness. Missionary propaganda formed the most self-conscious and determined articulation of this worldview, and was responsible for transforming this inherent

1 Even the religious reformer Vishnubuva Brahmachari (1825–71), who was to emerge in the 1850s as the most formidable and sophisticated opponent of Christian missionary propaganda, accepted the fundamental idea of nineteenth-century Hindu society's degeneracy, and advocated a return to the pure practices of the ancient Vedic past. I have not treated his ideas in detail here, since they do not fall within the immediate scope of this study.

conflict of values into a highly public and normatively charged contest of religious rectitude and social legitimacy. Amongst social reformers themselves there was, of course, a very wide spectrum of opinion about the precise direction that social and religious change should take. What they did share in common, however, was precisely the public hostility to some of the central practices and beliefs of traditional Hinduism that was to prove so damaging to its public credibility and to its means of asserting its own legitimacy in the face of the attacks of radicals like Phule. The reformers reflected, in a slightly different way, most of the concerns and attitudes which we have already seen presented as the ideological framework of Christian belief. Since they were convinced that Hindu society had suffered from a gradual descent into the economic and spiritual poverty of the present, they were determined to convey to India what they saw as the material and human advantages enjoyed by western societies. In their prescriptions for social and religious renewal, reformers identified themselves with subjective as opposed to ascriptive values, with all that this implied for the hierarchies of Hindu society, the privileges of Brahmans, and the devaluation of women and the lower castes. They felt that the most valuable kind of knowledge was that which was useful to man in his worldly life. This asset should be available to every individual through the creation of a channel of intellectual intercourse which all men shared in common. Implicit in all their writings was the idea of the present good of the community as the paramount social value. This was asserted against prescription as the traditional means of conferring legitimacy on social and religious hierarchies. Reformers assumed the concern of every informed individual in the discussion of these questions of public concern.

In their religious ideas, moderate reformers usually accepted some variant on the basic idea of a Supreme Being, the Creator of the universe who existed quite separate from the material world. He had created man to occupy a special moral sphere, and equipped him with reason so that he might understand his material world and exploit it for his support and comfort. He intended all his human creatures to enjoy the fruits of creation equally. This fitted both the ideological framework of mid-nineteenth-century Christianity, and the conceptions of the divine advanced by European religious radicals. The latter pointed to the idea of a universal deity and a religion valid for all men that transcended all particular religious doctrines. At the same time the very resemblance between deist ideas of the divine, and the basic notion of a single Creator put forward as the framework of Christian belief, made it seem possible that the secular truths and material benefits hitherto

associated with Christian societies might be equally well, if not better, enjoyed with a more universal monotheism.

Bal Shastri Jambhekar and the creation of a reformist press

Bal Shastri Jambhekar was born in 1810 in Ratnagiri into a Brahman family. In 1825, he went to Bombay and lodged with Bapusaheb Chatre, an early British inspector of schools and translator of Sanskrit, who taught many of the first generation of social reformers in Bombay in the 1820s. His career was a short but spectacular one. As secretary of the Bombay Educational Society at the age of 17, he translated Lord Brougham's *Treatise on the Objects, Advantages and Pleasures of Science* into Marathi. Shortly afterwards, he was made native secretary to the Oriental Translation Committee of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bombay, where he worked with John Wilson and the Oriental scholar Colonel Vans Kennedy. In 1831, he began publication of western India's first Anglo-vernacular weekly, the *Darpan*. On the establishment of the Elphinstone College in Bombay in 1834, he was made an assistant professor in mathematics, and head of the College School when it was founded in 1838. At the creation of the Board of Education in 1840, he was appointed educational inspector for the southern division, and a full professor in Elphinstone College, teaching mathematics and astronomy, and working out a set of Marathi terms for the new concepts that these introduced. He translated English works on a wide variety of subjects into Marathi: history, geography, grammar, mathematics, and psychology, and wrote many of his own works on these subjects in Marathi. He was a deeply religious man, especially committed to Maharashtra's *bhakti* tradition, publishing in 1845 a lithographed edition of the *Dnyaneshvari*, with critical comments on its internal dating. In his personal life he was a strict vegetarian, always wore the dress of a Pune Brahman, read the sacred books and performed the rite of *sandhya* each day, and gave *daksina* to Brahmans.[2] In matters of social reform, he felt that change should be carried out slowly, to preserve the best in the Hindu faith, whilst discarding the corrupt accretions of popular Hinduism. He founded the Native Improvement Society, of which Dadabhai Naoroji was a member. In the notorious case of Sripat Sheshadri (the Brahman boy whose readmission to caste after having shared a house with his elder brother, the

2 I have taken my information about Bal Shastri Jambhekar from *The Memoirs and Writings of Acharya Bal Shastri Jambhekar 1812–1846*, G. G. Jambhekar (ed.), Pune 1950, vol. 1, chap. 1 (English/Marathi). *Sandhya* is the religious meditation, repetition of mantras and other ceremonies performed in the evening by Brahmans and other twice-born castes. *Daksina* is a gift of money to a Brahman.

prominent convert Narayan Sheshadri, split Brahman opinion in Bombay into two camps) Jambhekar tried to mitigate the rigidities of Brahman orthodoxy and to have the boy accepted back into caste. He finished having to perform an elaborate ceremony at the instigation of the orthodox. The latter threatened again to boycott him when he tried to explain to them the phenomena of solar and lunar eclipses in the light of European astronomy, and to show how the traditional theories about eclipses should be discarded in favour of the true explanation. Having been made director of the new Normal Class at the Elphinstone School in Bombay, he died suddenly of fever in May 1846, his death lamented both by British and educated Indian opinion as a severe blow to the progress of reform ideas.

Jambhekar's first paper, the *Darpan*, launched in 1832, reflected the concerns and attitudes of the first generation of western-educated Indians, convinced of the need for an expansion of India's intellectual horizons and for a revaluation of her traditional social and religious beliefs. The prospectus in the first issue described the intention of the paper 'to open a field for free and public discussion on points connected with the prosperity of this country, and the happiness of its inhabitants'. It intended to promote the literature and learning of Europe, especially those parts which promised the greatest advantage to India.[3] Beginning as a fortnightly publication, it was converted into a weekly after only four months, and by the end of the year it had a circulation of 300 copies.[4] Its introductory essay on the advantages of periodical publication (as it pointed out, a phenomenon quite new in Indian society), reflected both the conviction of a social and material advantage enjoyed by western societies, and the projection of the present welfare of the community as a matter of 'public' concern, and an overriding social value. The press, it stated, possessed enormous power to bring about renewal in Indian society by 'chasing away the mists of error and ignorance which clouded men's minds, and shedding over them the light of knowledge, in which the people of Europe have advanced so far before the other nations of the world'. The press would also create 'a channel of intellectual intercourse' which would keep Indians informed about events in different parts of the world, and stimulate the intellectual curiosity essential for any real improvement in Indian society.[5]

The *Darpan*'s argument that human intellecual effort should be

3 *Darpan* (English/Marathi), 6 January 1832.
4 Jambhekar (ed.), *Memoirs and Writings of A. B. S. Jambhekar*, vol. 1, p. xvi.
5 *Darpan*, 6 January 1832.

directed above all to the discovery of useful knowledge reflected the idea of man's control over his environment through the use of his practical reason. It also contained the notion of linear human progress to an absolute understanding of the moral and material world, in which some societies would be left behind because of their inadequate grasp of these truths. Indian society had always cultivated the arts and sciences, but had regarded knowledge 'as useful only in religion, or as a means of gaining victory in argument, and in no way connected with the common purposes of life'. The changes of the last twenty years made it imperative that Indians should recognise that much of their ancient learning had lost its value, and that they should turn instead 'to bestow their attention on the useful arts and sciences, their practical application to the common purposes of life; and in short, to gain every acquisition which has rendered European nations superior to Asiatics, and from the want of which their country has so much suffered'.[6]

Some traditional practices received heavy criticism. Indian nautches not only corrupted public morals and made prostitutes of the girls who took part in them, but violated every proper religious feeling: 'With Mussulmans and Parsees, as well as with Hindoos, Nautches are considered necessary, wherever the expense can be afforded, to the celebration of rites most solemn; and with Hindoos, even those which are accounted most sacred are profaned and mixed up with such exhibitions.'[7] The *Darpan* rejoiced at the suppression of *thagi*, which it described as common murder, and expressed its horror at the practice of female infanticide in Malwa.[8]

In 1840, the *Darpan* ceased publication, and Jambhekar brought out the *Dig Darshan* to replace it. Entirely in Marathi, it was much more concerned with the spread of practical and general knowledge. It published essays and articles on geography, history, natural philosophy, chemistry, and natural science. It lasted for four years, and was replaced in 1845 with the much more successful *Prabhakar*, which Jambhekar edited with the reformer Bhau Mahajan.[9]

For the next decade the *Prabhakar* formed the main mouthpiece for the expression of reformist opinion in western India. It reflected the range of concerns with which we are already familiar. It expressed hostility to ascriptive values in the hierarchies of caste, the privileges of Brahmans, and the devaluation of women and the lower castes. Central

6 ibid., 24 August 1832. 7 ibid., 14 September 1832.

8 ibid., 27 March 1835.

9 Jambhekar (ed.), *Memoirs and Writings of A. B. S. Jambhekar*, vol. 1, pp. xxxiv–xxxvi. Govind Viththal, or 'Bhau' Mahajan (1815–90) was active in many of the campaigns for social and religious reform in the mid-century, and also helped in the organisation of the theist religious group, the Paramahansa Mandali, or 'Society of the Supreme Being'.

to its arguments was the conviction of a unique and beneficent deity who had created a special moral sphere for man's existence. It held strongly the belief that the decline of Indian society from its former pre-eminence could be reversed only by the pursuit of the material and social benefits that evidently accompanied the social and scientific worldview of European societies. A very strong pointer to the immense impact of the worldview of mid-nineteenth-century western science and religion, and its self-conscious articulation in missionary propaganda, was that for the first five years of its existence the *Dnyanodaya* newspaper relied to a very large extent upon extracts from the articles and correspondence of Jambhekar's *Prabhakar* for its arguments on the necessity of social reform. This is not to say that the *Prabhakar* tamely reflected missionary criticisms of Indian society and religion. On the contrary, it was the very disjunction between specific Christian doctrines and the more general worldview of mid-nineteenth-century science and religion, for which missionary propaganda acted as a vehicle and a mouthpiece, that allowed reformers to detach the general ideological conceptions from specific Christian beliefs, and to apply these in the cause of India's moral and material improvement.

Much of the character of the *Prabhakar* was provided by the prominent social reformer Gopal Hari Deshmukh, the 'Lokahitavadi', who published in it his cycle of a hundred letters dealing with topics of social reform during the late 1840s.[10] His main concern lay in the decline of India's traditional prosperity and intellectual pre-eminence through its thoughtless identification over the centuries with ascriptive values. This tendency had been encouraged by Brahmans, who saw that they had much to gain through the hereditary conferment of religious privileges. Many of his letters were concerned with the social effects of a commitment to ascriptive values in stifling individual enterprise and merit, with the decline of social leadership in Indian society and the need for a social order which would more accurately reflect individual effort. One of his letters, published in the *Prabhakar* of 11 June 1848 and reprinted in the *Dnyanodaya*, on the character of present-day Brahmans, represented a good example of his ideas. It was clear from the writings of the ancient Hindu sages, Valmik and Vyas, that Brahmans of those days could come from any caste. Their promotion was the result of individual virtue, and they possessed talent and discipline:

From this, it is clear that the Brahmans of those days were learned and intelligent, unlike the stupid Brahmans of the present, and there was not the

10 For an account of Gopal Hari Deshmukh's career and ideas, see V. K. Kshire, *Lokahitavadi's Thought: A Critical Study*, University of Pune 1977.

rigid prohibition against mixing outside the caste or against the strict letter of the Shastras. Instead, they continually re-thought their ideas, and if they saw that a particular custom had evil results, they would have no hesitation in discontinuing it.

The contrast with the present day was depressing:

But now, these sorts of prohibitions have been in operation for two thousand years. The people have become blind and stopped thinking for themselves. The sort of Brahman who studied the sciences, or who withdrew to the wilds to meditate, is no more to be seen. Now, some of our Brahmans have become rich; others spend their time in pursuit of good food given for nothing, or wating to see who will give out daksina. Although they know the Vedas off by heart, they are the enemies of its true meaning. I hesitate to call them learned at all, because a man who just repeats the words without understanding the meaning is of no more value than an animal making noises to itself.[11]

His view of the search for religious merit in the performance of feats of ascetic self-denial reflected this rejection of ascriptive values, and of the traditional Hindu attitude towards worldly existence. God had intended men to live comfortably and happily in the world, and gave them their bodies to be human, not to live in the jungle like animals:

If anyone says that it is useless to labour, to feed and clothe ourselves and support our families, and that God takes no pleasure in these things, let us make it clear that these opinions are against the nature of God and contrary to man's reason.

It was much better for a man to devote himself to his worldly life rather than performing useless acts of asceticism:

because if God had had it in mind to make man into a being like a wild animal, without the power of reason, then he would have created him in the form of a tiger or some other wild animal, and set him to live in the wilds. But he did not create him like this, so it is better to act like a human being, using our reason, and to marry and raise a family, to work for their support, and to help the poor.[12]

Quite apart from Gopal Hari Deshmukh's substantial contributions, the *Prabhakar* carried in every issue a large number of articles and letters that reflected the concerns and attitudes typical of the early social reformers. It was particularly vehement about some traditional religious practices that violated both man's reason and his proper notions of social justice. A letter of 8 August 1848, from 'an enemy of hypocrisy', inveighed against the exploitation of credulous Hindus by professional confidence tricksters who pretended to enjoy special favour with local gods, or pretended possession by supernatural powers, in

11 *Prabhakar* (Marathi), 11 June 1848, reprinted in *Dnyanodaya*, 15 June 1848.
12 *Prabhakar*, 13 August 1848, reprinted in *Dnyanodaya*, 15 August 1848.

order to extract money from devotees. The letter urged readers to 'consider how the Hindoo religion is derided and brought into contempt through means of these impostors'.[13]

The Marathi Society for the Spread of Knowledge

This society, the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha, was founded in 1848 by a group of reformers and students at Elphinstone College. Its members included some of the most prominent social reformers of the 1840s. Daboba Pandurang was its first president, Mahadev Govind Shastri its secretary, and Narayan Dinanathji and Laksman Narasinha Joshi its committee members.[14] Its statement of intention reflected the desire of early reformers that 'the faults and shortcomings of the people of this country should be brought to light'.[15] The idea of the decline and corruption of ancient Hindu society through the influence of ascriptive values formed a basic assumption of the society. The society also published a newspaper, the *Marathi Dnyan Prasarak*. In a long essay entitled 'The past, present and future state of this country', it set out the causes of India's decline. Under the influence of a corrupted religious orthodoxy, religious merit was reduced to a mere performance of external observances. Divisions grew up between men as rigid as those between men and animals. Brahmans arrogated to themselves the position of gods on earth, and passed their privileges on to their descendants as a matter of course, regardless of their individual worth. After centuries of such abuse,

> our political power has been destroyed, our wealth has gone, our institutions have decayed, our trade is worth nothing, our ancient learning has been ruined, the incentive for individual education has disappeared, ignorance has increased, our once glorious cities have vanished and our peasantry has become impoverished.

Only at the onset of British rule, with its vastly superior social values and material achievements, did Indians begin to awake to the true moral and material poverty of their position. The essay finished with a eulogy to these values and achievements, from the innovations of the British legal system to the invention of the watch and the steam engine.[16]

13 *Prabhakar*, 8 August 1847, reprinted in *Dnyanodaya*, 1 September 1847.

14 For an account of the career and ideas of the social reformer and religious radical Dadoba Pandurang, see A. K. Priolkar, *Dadoba Pandurang*, Bombay 1947 (Marathi), and by the same author, *The Autobiography of Dadoba Pandurang*, A. K. Priolkar (ed.), Bombay 1973 (Marathi). For further references to Dadoba here, see p. 227.

15 *Marathi Dnyan Prasarak* (Marathi), April 1850.

16 ibid., July 1850.

The *Marathi Dnyan Prasarak* portrayed man's spiritual condition and his position in material creation in terms essentially similar to those set out as the ideological framework of Christian belief. In the first lecture presented to the Sabha, and published in April 1850, man was presented as a different order of being from animals, endowed by God with reason so that he could understand his environment and use it for his support. This was the importance of knowledge to man; it represented his key to every kind of social and material happiness that his Creator intended him to enjoy. It was India's task to shake off her own inertia and join in the application of this knowledge to her own social structure and religious beliefs.[17] The miracles of western scientific knowledge formed a constant source of comment, and articles frequently pointed out how these could be useful to Hindus in the control of their everyday environment. One long article explained how a knowledge of the properties of oxygen and carbon dioxide could prevent a frequent cause of death from asphyxiation during the repair of very deep wells.[18]

Moreover, knowledge was not merely a means to material comfort, but allowed man to perceive his real moral condition, and his relation with his fellow men and with God. Here, the *Marathi Dnyan Prasarak* strongly echoed mid-nineteenth-century Christianity's belief of the ultimate unity of all truth, social, scientific, and religious. An article of December 1850 exhorted readers to carry out their pursuit of knowledge diligently, and they would advance their understanding of the wonders of God's universe, and be led to put their faith in him and his laws. They would be brought to see that the very purity of God's nature implied a code of conduct for man's everyday life in the avoidance of all lying, cheating, stealing, and sensual indulgence, and in the pursuit of the social harmony in which God intended all men to live.[19]

The 'Society of the Supreme Being'

The Paramahansa Mandali, the 'Society of the Supreme Being',[20] was a secret society founded in Bombay at about the same time as the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha.[21] As he did in the latter, the reformer Dadoba Pandurang took a leading part in its foundation, while he was director of the Normal Class at Elphinstone College. He recruited members for

17 ibid., April 1850. 18 ibid., December 1855. 19 ibid., December 1850.

20 The term *Paramahansa* is both one of the names of God, and a term for an ascetic who has subdued his senses by meditation.

21 A. K. Priolkar argues that the most likely date for the founding of the Paramahansa Mandali would be 1849, after the return of Dadoba Pandurang from Surat: Priolkar, *Dadoba Pandurang*, p. 251.

both groups from amongst the students of the college, so that their membership frequently overlapped.[22] The Paramahansa Mandali formed the counterpart, in religious ideas, of the reform attitudes expressed in the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha. Its account of the relations between God and man reflected the parallelism between the ideological framework of Christian belief conveyed in missionary propaganda, and the ideas of European radicals. The Mandali tried to arrive at an idea of the Creator, and of the religious duties ordained for man, that would transcend all particular religious confessions, and reflect the universality of the Supreme Being, and the real unity of all men as his creation. Such a universal monotheism offered the answer to Hinduism's problems of spiritual decay and material backwardness. The idea of the individual in society that it offered would free man's energies from their stultification by the ascriptive values of popular Hinduism. At the same time, it seemed even more compatible with the secular truths and material benefits associated with western societies, and amplified in missionary propaganda, than the particularist doctrines of Christianity. Following this external stimulus to re-examine the beliefs and social consequences of contemporary popular Hinduism, the Paramahansa Mandali was, in its later form as the Prarthana Samaj, the 'Prayer Society', to turn back to the ideas of monotheism to be found within the Hindu tradition.[23]

The origins of the Paramahansa Mandali tell us much about the formation of its opinion. After teaching at the Elphinstone College, Dadoba Pandurang went in 1841 to Surat in Gujarat to help found the new English school. There, two influences were important. He became friendly with two *shastris*, Nirbhayaramashastri and Yadneshvarashastri, and learned Sanskrit. He read the ancient Hindu texts, and saw that these diverged widely from current practices, especially in the latter's uncritical regard for Brahmans. Secondly, in Surat he shared a house with Henry Green, the headmaster of the English school. Green was an

22 This coincidence in the membership of the two societies seems to have been regarded by the orthodox in Bombay as a typical example of the way in which western education undermined the religious beliefs of young Hindus. The *Dnyanodaya* of 15 March 1852 records that a Hindu Sabha had been formed in Bombay after leading Hindus in the city started to learn about the opinions of the young English-educated students of the Paramahansa Mandali: that caste should be abolished and drastic changes introduced in conventional religious beliefs and, more worryingly still, that the apparently respectable leaders of the Dnyan Prasarak Sabha in Elphinstone College were all members of this secret society.

23 For a short account of the Prarthana Samaj, see J. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in the nineteenth century*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 81–5; and M. Lederle, *Philosophical Trends in Modern Maharashtra*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1976, pp. 80–5.

agnostic, who discussed with Dadoba the contradictions and inconsistencies in the Christian religion.[24] Dadoba became convinced that there was some truth about man's relations with God in every religion. If it were possible to take these elements of truth, and discard the local and the particular aspects, then all men might enjoy the spiritual and temporal advantages of a true universal religion, without the shortcomings of the revealed religions that sowed such discord among men at present. With Durgaram Mancharam, a master at the Gujarati school in Surat, and two others, Dinamanishankar and Dalpatram Bhagubhai, Dadoba established in Surat the Manavadharma Sabha, the 'Society for Human Religion'.[25]

The rules of this society were:

1 There is one God of all the world.
2 Mankind is all of the same caste.
3 Mankind's religion is one, and it is only his pride which makes him think that his religion differs from others.
4 Amongst men, who is great and who is inferior is decided by virtue, and not by birth.
5 Men should act according to their reason.
6 Men should worship God, and this is an obligation.
7 All men should inform others of the lessons of the path of virtue.[26]

The members of the Manavadharma Sabha kept its existence a secret. One of their activities was to conduct a campaign in Surat in 1845 against belief in magic and the power of *mantras* and magical incantations. They published a challenge to anyone who wanted to come forward and prove that he could perform acts of magic. Their challenge was taken up by one Vijayarambuva, who tried to perform feats of magic in front of a large crowd, and failed. The infuriated crowd, according to the *Dnyanodaya*, who reported the incident, then turned on the reformers, and they were forced to seek refuge in Dadoba's house.[27]

In 1846, Dadoba returned to Bombay to take up the post of director of the Normal Class, and became friendly with Ramachandra Balakrshna Jayakar. Jayakar had been headmaster of the government high schools in Ratnagiri and Thana, and in 1849 he left the Education Department for the post of assistant commissioner in the Customs Department.[28] It is probable that the Mandali was started at that time, with Jayakar its first president and Dadoba Pandurang providing the ideas and forms of worship.[29]

24 A. K. Priolkar, *Dadoba Pandurang*, p. 242.
25 ibid., p. 243. 26 ibid., p. 244. 27 ibid., p. 248. 28 ibid., pp. 250–1.
29 Dadoba Pandurang, however, never actually became a member of the Paramahansa Mandali, despite contributing so much to its ideas. Baba Padmanji records that

Like the Manavadharma Sabha, the Paramahansa Mandali was kept a closely guarded secret by its members. Direct evidence about its beliefs and practices is hard to find. The best account is in Baba Padmanji's *Arunodaya*. Padmanji had himself been a member before his conversion to Christianity. The book also contains copies of letters written to Padmanji from fellow converts who had also belonged to the Mandali, in answer to Padmanji's requests for information about it. Padmanji described his own introduction to the society, after two or three of his friends found that he was willing to break caste. They took him to a meeting, where there were a large number of people of different castes. He said that he felt happy to see that so many others felt like him. He learned that the society believed that caste divisions and idol worship were wrong, and that the remarriage of widows should be allowed. They had not yet decided what the rest of their opinions were to be. The society was to be kept a secret until there were over a thousand members. New members had to agree to the rules, and to take bread and milk from the same vessels as the other members. At the beginning and end, Marathi prayers by Dadoba Pandurang were read.[30]

The Mandali never produced a definitive text expounding its beliefs. However, Padmanji mentioned that, on hearing that he was considering conversion to Christianity, a friend gave him a hand-written book setting out the Mandali's opinions in an organised way. This book was later published in 1868, after the demise of the Mandali, as *A discussion on religion*.[31] A. K. Priolkar has argued convincingly that this book, which was sub-titled *A few discriminating thoughts on religion and social institutions, chiefly of the Indian Aryas, by a cosmopolitan Arya*, was actually written by Dadoba himself, and represented an amplification of the rules of the earlier Manavadharma Sabha.[32] The propositions set out at the beginning of the book certainly support this argument, and can therefore be seen as the nearest we can get to a systematic statement of the Mandali's views:

1 God is one, and he alone is to be worshipped.
2 Religion consists in worshipping God with love and through moral conduct.
3 The religion of mankind is one.
4 Every individual has an independent right to consider for himself.

Dadoba Pandurang and Bhau Mahajan were of the Mandali's opinions, but never came to its meetings. They stayed in another room, and met the other members afterwards. But Dadoba's brother Atmaram not only came to meetings, but also held them in his own house: Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, Bombay 1888, p. 178.

30 ibid., pp. 173–82.

31 Having seen the book in its manuscript form, Baba Padmanji wrote a refutation of its arguments against revealed religion in a work published in 1858: *An Examination of the Claims of Deism* (Marathi).

32 A. K. Priolkar, *Dadoba Pandurang*, pp. 245–8.

5 Daily and Occasional religious ceremonies should be consistent with human reason.
6 The whole of human kind is one caste.
7 Every human being is to be brought up and instructed in useful knowledge.[33]

A very clear pointer to the connection between the Paramahansa Mandali and the society organised by Phule was that this same book was to be used in lectures, and copies disseminated by the latter as part of its propaganda campaigns in Pune and its environs in the 1870s.

Branches of the Mandali were formed in Pune, Satara, Ahmadnagar, Belgaum, and Ratnagiri. R. G. Bhandarkar, who had been a member, described the spread of the Mandali's opinions to the provincial towns in the Deccan and Konkan, and the way in which he came to accept its views. The students of Dadoba's Normal Class

> passed their exams and became teachers themselves, and wherever they went into the towns outside, they spread the opinions and practices of the Paramahansa Mandali. One of these students was a master at Ratnagiri. I was there until 1852. This master gave to many students the precepts of the Paramahansa Mandali. A friend of mine accepted the Mandali's opinions, and tried to turn me in that direction. When we went for long walks in the evenings, we talked about the evils of caste distinctions, how much damage was done by this division between high and low, and how true progress for this country could never be achieved without removing these distinctions. I agreed with all these opinions, but at that time I did not become a member. In 1853, I was working at the Elphinstone Institute, and became a member of the Paramahansa Mandali at sixteen years of age.[34]

Baba Padmanji received a very full description of the Ahmadnagar branch of the Mandali from Kasam Mahamadji, who later became a Christian. The account suggests strong differences of opinion in the Mandali. At first, Mahamadji recorded, there were just fifteen or twenty members in the branch. Many were students of the government English school who had lost their faith in their own religion through the progress of English knowledge. There was no definitive book of rules, but members thought that they should not observe caste, should not worship idols, should permit widow remarriage, should educate women, and should spread education amongst the lower castes. They did not accept the atheistic opinions urged on them by some reformists

33 *A discussion on religion: a few discriminating thoughts on religion and social institutions, chiefly of the Indian Aryas, by a cosmopolitan Arya*, Bombay 1868 (Marathi). This list forms the table of contents of the book, which was dedicated to the Prarthana Samaj. A copy of this is available in the India Office Library and Records.
34 R. G. Bhandarkar, speech to the Second Conference of the Aryan Brotherhood, quoted in A. K. Priolkar, *Dadoba Pandurang*, pp. 251–3.

in Pune and Bombay. They thought that there was a single Creator, the author of the universe, who had sent no particular religious text to man, since human understanding sufficed to tell man of all his duties. Every week, some members went to a secluded place outside the town to pray. They took an English Christian prayer book, omitting Christ's name and some other matters that seemed particular to the Christian religion. But the leaders of the Ahmadnagar branch refused to join them for this.[35]

This suggestion of disagreement is confirmed elsewhere: in Padmanji's account of his reading a paper before the atheist group from Pune, and in a letter written to Padmanji by Narayan Raghunath, a member of the Bombay branch at the same time as Padmanji, who recalled in detail the arguments that had taken place about the necessity of a divine revelation.[36] In the end, Padmanji and Narayan Raghunath had left the Mandali over this issue. With some other members they set up the Satyashodhak Sabha, the 'Truth-Seeking Society'. This group came much closer to a definite adoption of the Bible as divine revelation, and some of its members converted to Christianity soon afterwards.[37]

It is possible to guess at the existence of other disagreements within the Mandali. While on the one hand, Dadoba Pandurang and Bhau Mahajan were not prepared to go so far in their personal breaking of caste as to take part in the actual meetings of the Bombay branch, other members were very much more radical. They carried bread openly in the streets to their meeting-place at Jayakar's house. Prior to using this as a meeting-place, they had rented a house in the Khattravadi area of Bombay. The owner of the house locked them out after he heard of their activities, fearing trouble. So the members broke back into the house, and desecrated the idols of the house, throwing them down into a corner.[38] These disagreements reflected the peculiar ideological position of the society. On the one hand, its radical deist ideas tended to take on an almost anti-religious tone, especially in the hands of young students. On the other, the society was based on the very idea of the religious as the foundation on which a new social order might be constructed.

The date of the Mandali's demise is uncertain. It suffered a severe blow in 1860, when its membership list was stolen, and the fear of

35 Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, pp. 362–5. 36 ibid., pp. 409–11.

37 This term 'Satyashodhak', 'Truth-Seeking', was eventually to be used by Phule himself in 1873 in his first attempt to set up a permanent institution to fight for the cause of the lower castes, the Satyashodhak Samaj. See pp. 220–51.

38 This information is contained in a letter about the Paramahansa Mandali, published in the *Indu Prakash* (English/Marathi), 11 May 1885, and signed 'A Political Rishi'.

exposure was thought to have brought all activity to a halt.[39] Yet G. N. Madgaonkar's description of Bombay written in 1863 asserted that members of the Mandali were still active.[40] In his obituary on Dadoba Pandurang's death in 1882, Baba Padmanji traced the demise of the Mandali to the decision by some members to form another society in which they would be quite open about their beliefs. The first meeting of the Prarthana Samaj was held at the house of Atmaram Pandurang on 30 December 1866, and included some of the members of the Mandali: Durgaram Mancharam and the Prabhu reformer, Moroba Kanhoba,[41] although not Dadoba Pandurang.[42] However, the formation of the Prarthana Samaj also reflected an ideological shift away from the covert but uncompromising religious and social radicalism of the Mandali. While maintaining the idea of a universal kingdom of God, the Samaj observed the basic social rules of Hindu society, hoping that social reform would naturally follow progress in religious ideas. The Samaj also turned to western India's own religious traditions, notably the *bhakti* saints of Maharashtra, and searched for a synthesis rather than a complete rejection of traditional religious ideas.

39 A. K. Priolkar, *Dadoba Pandurang*, p. 259. Priolkar argues that the list of members was stolen not by a Hindu zealot who wanted to publish it, since this was never done, but by one of the members who regretted joining and wished to destroy the evidence of his having done so.

40 G. N. Madgaonkar, *A description of Bombay*, Bombay 1863 (Marathi), p. 344.

41 Moroba Kanhoba was a social reformer of the Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu caste, active in the cause of widow remarriage in the 1860s.

42 *Dnyanodaya*, 26 October 1882.

PART 3

Jotirao Phule and his circle: the emergence of a distinctive radical voice

5
Student radicals in mid-nineteenth-century western India

Introduction

Small but centrally placed groups of Hindu reformers thus experienced a profound upheaval in their religious values and in their confidence in existing social institutions. This disquiet amongst Hindus themselves, together with the highly effective propaganda campaigns of protestant Christian missionaries, formed the most important influences upon the reformist ideas of the young generation of students at the mission and English government schools in the larger urban centres of western India. During the 1840s Jotirao Phule was a student at a school in Pune run by the missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland. His caste was a reflection of the social heterogeneity of the Scottish mission school. While children of the untouchable Mahar and Mang castes were very few, the school accepted pupils from a very wide variety of cultivating, artisan, and trading castes, as well as from the customarily literate higher castes.

The Mali caste, to which Phule's family belonged, were gardeners. They made their living in western Maharashtra cultivating fruit, flowers, and vegetables, often using a network of kin connections to transport their produce to market and sell it. With this simultaneous concern with semi-rural cultivation and with large urban markets, the Mali caste often acted as a medium of contact between rural areas and the growing urban centres of western India. The Malis ranked as *Shudra* in the four-fold *varna* scheme. In the local caste hierarchy, however, they appear to have occupied quite a respectable position, roughly equivalent to that of Maharashtra's large grouping of peasant, land-holding, and cultivating castes, the Maratha-*kunbis*.

Jotirao Phule's grandfather, Shetiba, had been the son of a petty village official near the town of Satara, some fifty miles to the south of Pune. Shetiba reduced the once-prosperous family to poverty and they moved to Pune, where the family began to make a living cultivating and selling their produce. The family's services recommended them to the Maratha peshwa, Bajirao II, and he engaged them to supply the court in Pune with flowers for the numerous ritual and religious ceremonies that

were necessary for a Maratha ruler and a Brahman. Bajirao II was evidently pleased with the family's work, for he conferred on them thirty-five acres of *inam* land, on which no tax was payable, just outside Pune. Phule's father, Govindrao, set up a greengrocer's shop in Pune to sell the produce from the land. He married one Chimnabai, the daughter of the Mali Zagade family, who were the *patils* of Kavadi village near Pune. They had two sons, of whom Jotirao, born in 1827, was the younger. Phule's father sent the young Jotirao first to a small local Marathi school for his primary education, and then to one of the Scottish mission schools in Pune.

With this background, and the influences of the family, school, and the local community, the social and religious issues of public debate took on a personal and concrete form for Phule and other young radicals as individuals. Two features of their environment stand out. The first is the heterogeneity of the institutions, individuals, and other points of contact through which Phule and his friends received new ideas. While mission schools and newspapers were the most important influences in creating the distinctive consensus of opinion shared by the young reformers, the government schools, individual British administrators, and the new vernacular press appear also as significant agents of change in their personal lives. It was neither the systematic criticism of traditional Hindu society articulated in missionary propaganda, nor the ideas of European religious radicals alone which shaped the intellectual development of Hindu radicals and reformers, but their simultaneous reinforcement and counterbalancing of each other.

The second striking feature of the early experience of Phule and his colleagues is the function of the schools and colleges that they attended, and of their peer goups in them, in the assimilation by the individual of ideas of social reform and religious radicalism. It would be easy to assume that the mixing together of different social groups, the weakening of the traditional social ties of family and their replacement by the bond of a common activity and occupation, the higher levels of literacy, the greater awareness of new ideas and new challenges to traditional beliefs, and the increased opportunities for individual mobility through the provision of employment, that shaped the early experience of young radicals like Phule, were specifically the product of an urban environment. This was not quite the case. It was rather at the level of the school and the college that these changes took place. It is possible to see the same processes at work in the case of reformers who lived in small provincial towns, altogether lacking the relative individual mobility or intellectual intensity of larger centres like Bombay or Pune, when these individuals attended a government or missionary school.

Here, the peer group also emerges as a vital part of the process by which new ideas were assimilated. Most changes in religious attitudes by young Hindus were not made in isolation, but as part of discussion groups among friends and classmates, impromptu societies set up in colleges for the debate of new ideas, or semi-secret associations of like-minded students set up to carry the new ideas into action by a violation of caste rules. As a set of young students and scholars all subject to the same very strong influences, the peer group enforced a temporary intellectual uniformity on its members. In most of the examples for which we have evidence, traditional attitudes were uprooted, not by direct contact with the sources of new ideas, but by the ideas themselves being passed on by fellow students and pressed upon the individual with the encouragement and support of his fellows. This focus on the specific institutional environment within which new ideas were received helps to explain the dynamics of Phule's own circle of friends and fellow students: their close agreement during their school years and co-operation in projects of reform afterwards in the late 1840s, followed by the development of disagreements and withdrawal from joint projects as the school environment was replaced by new and divergent occupations and experiences.

As far as we know, Phule has left no direct and detailed account of his early career. Much of the information that we have derives from biographies written some considerable time after Phule's death in 1890, which frequently offer no adequate documentation for the details that they give. Moreover, the most important of these, published in 1927, was itself written by a non-Brahman activist, P. S. Patil.[1] This means that its account of Phule's early years can only be used with great caution. Since we lack much reliable detail of Phule's early experience, we will also look at that of three others who underwent a similar education, and who have left behind very detailed accounts of its effect on their intellectual development. Two of these were Phule's colleagues and friends: Baba Padmanji, educated at mission schools in Belgaum and Bombay, and later a convert to Christianity, and Moro Viththal Valavekar, educated at the Scottish mission school in Pune at the same time as Phule. Valavekar was also to be a co-worker in Phule's first active projects of social reform: the founding of schools for the education of girls and the lower castes in Pune in the late 1840s. The third was Krshnarao Ratnaji Sangle, a member of the Sali, or weaver, caste. He was educated in the 1850s, in the American mission school at Ahmadnagar, a small provincial town to the north-east of Pune. He was

1 P. S. Patil, *The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule*, Chikhali 1927 (Marathi).

neither a friend nor a colleague of Phule's, but provides a useful contrast to the examples of young reformers educated in the larger urban centres.

Scottish mission schools in Pune and Bombay

Missionary strategies and attitudes, and in particular their combativeness in the face of traditional institutions and beliefs, set the tone of the schools in Pune and Bombay. The report of the Annual Examination of the Mission English Institution at Pune in 1850 stated the Mission's policy: 'Whilst we endeavour to afford them the best literary and scientific education, we give them also a thorough Christian training, at least as far as our means of doing so extend. They have the truth constantly placed before them and urged upon their acceptance.' Science featured largely in the curriculum. The natural sciences, botany and ethnology were taught, including 'the varieties and dispersion of the human race', and physiology, including 'the organs and functions of animal life'.[2] As a matter of course for their teachers, these subjects presented the natural world, devoid of divine or magical significance, as available for human analysis and understanding. This, on the other hand, appeared as a startlingly new and incontrovertible truth for the young Hindu student. They turned upside down beliefs he had always accepted without question, and left him at a loss in the activities that were founded on those beliefs. Significantly, the textbook for natural philosophy was Whewell's *Bridgewater Treatises*, with their strong underlying belief that religious and scientific truth were coterminous, and that the beauty and harmony of creation was testimony to the overwhelming power and benevolence of the Creator. Amongst the subjects taught in theology were the sinful state of man and its remedy, and the nature of the Saviour and the proof of his divinity.

Some of the missionaries' own comments reveal the intense emphasis on the propagation of Christian truth. Murray Mitchell, who taught both in Pune and Bombay during the 1840s and early 1850s, described how: 'The doctrines and duties of our holy faith are fully illustrated to all the pupils, and the Bible is made a class book, as soon as they can read it intelligibly. The duties of the day are now regularly commenced with prayer to God.'[3] A feature of missionary activity of great import-

2 Report of the Annual Examination of the Mission English Institution at Pune, 1850, printed in the *Poona Observer*, 30 October 1850, National Library of Scotland (NLS), MSS vol. 8976 fol. 8.

3 Murray Mitchell to the Reverend Dr Brunton, Convenor of the Scottish General Assembly's Convention on Missions, Edinburgh. Pune, 26 December 1838, NLS, MSS vol. 7531, fol. 196v.

ance in the intellectual development of young radicals was the informal discussion groups held after school hours with the more interested and promising boys. Mitchell reported of his students: 'I still continue to meet with them on an evening once a week for the study of natural history, which seems to interest them, and affords many opportunities for pointing out to them the glorious attributes of the Deity.'[4] Arguments against the social and ritual distinctions of caste, based on the observable physiological similarities between men everywhere and the intentions of their Creator that this revealed, were later to form a standard tactic in debate for radicals like Phule. It is very likely that discussion groups like these were one source of the ideas behind them. Mitchell even held informal meetings for the boys of the government English school in Pune to compensate for what he saw as their lack of proper religious instruction:

I have commenced by discoursing to them on the nature and operations of the human mind. It is my purpose, God willing, after giving them a short and as interesting a view as I can of this important subject, to lead them on to the proper use of their powers in the investigations of both moral and physical truth. I will, of course, as soon as circumstances permit, introduce to their notice the study of the evidences of our Holy Faith.[5]

This policy was not without effect on the boys: 'So far from objecting to read the Bible, they seem to delight in it above all other books, and peruse it at their spare time as well as in school.'

Another important aspect of the Scottish mission schools was their determination to admit boys of untouchable castes like any other, if they could fulfil the entry requirements. The missionaries regarded this as a crucial part of their public stand against Brahmanic religious values. This provoked quite frequent conflict with Brahman students. A collision of this sort occurred in 1842, over the admission of a Mahar boy. Mitchell described how:

No sooner had he taken his seat in the class to which he was appointed, than the boys in it objected to his so doing, and were joined by the Brahmans in the other classes. They were told that their complaint could not be regarded; that the school was open to everyone who chose to attend; that they might as well object to the presence of Christians and Musulmans.[6]

This free intermingling of castes previously kept from each other, the indiscriminate availability of education, and the atmosphere of hostility

4 Murray Mitchell to Brunton, Pune, 31 October 1838, NLS, MSS vol. 7531, fol. 187.
5 Murray Mitchell to Brunton, Pune, 31 October 1838, NLS, MSS vol. 7531, fols. 187–187v.
6 Murray Mitchell to Brunton, Pune, 31 December 1842, NLS, MSS vol. 7532 (1), fols. 197–197v.

to conventional religious hierarchies, were to have a lasting effect on Phule and others of his circle who attended the schools.

Phule's education

According to his first biographer, Phule attended a small village school just outside Pune between 1834 and 1838, when he would have been between seven and eleven years old.[7] There is a story, repeated by all his biographers, but very difficult to document, that a Brahman clerk in his father's produce shop persuaded Govindrao to withdraw the boy from the school and put him to work tending the crops. The motive given in the story is the Brahman's fear that the young boy might become skilled enough in writing and accounts for his father to be able to dispense with the services of a clerk.[8] In 1841, the biographies record that a learned Muslim, Guffar Beg Munshi, a teacher in Urdu and Persian, and a friendly British administrator, Mr Leggit, persuaded Govindrao to send the 14-year-old boy back to school. Accordingly he was sent to the Scottish mission school run by Murray Mitchell. He remained there until 1847, and left having completed his secondary education in English. At this school, he met two of the Brahman friends who were to work with him in the low caste schools project. These were Sadashiv Ballal Govande, son of a poor Brahman family, and three years older than Phule, and Moro Viththal Valavekar, also a poor Brahman boy who, like Phule, was later employed as a teacher at the Scottish mission school.[9]

Phule's biographers give their first direct comments on the development of Phule's ideas for the year 1847. The 20-year-old Phule and his friends are said to have been fired with ideas of liberating their country from foreign rule by their reading of the lives of Shivaji and George Washington, and of the work of Thomas Paine, and by the influence of anti-British Brahmans.[10] The young students took lessons in *dandapatta*, a style of fencing with staves, from Lahujibuva Mang, who was later to teach Vasudev Balavant Phadake, the leader of the revolt that took place in western Maharashtra in 1879 against British rule.[11] As

7 Patil, *Mahatma Phule*, p. 16.

8 ibid. The story is also found in D. Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 11–12.

9 The information in this section about Moro Viththal Valavekar is taken from his MSS autobiography, published in the journal *Parag* (Marathi), February and March 1949, edited by C. G. Karve.

10 Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley*, p. 14. Phule's own work on Shivaji, and his admiration for Paine's ideas would seem to confirm this: see pp. 168–75 and 195–9. Govande later wrote a Marathi biography of George Washington, published in 1892.

11 Patil, *Mahatma Phule*, p. 19.

Dhananjay Keer has argued, the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century were a period of frequent conflict with the new rulers in Maharashtra: Umaji Naik and his Ramoshi followers in 1826, the rebellion amongst the Koli or fisher caste in 1830, the deposition of Pratapsinh of Satara in 1839, the revolts of Bhau Khare, Chimnaji Jadhav, and Nana Darbare in the name of the deposed peshwa between 1839 and 1846, and that of Bapu and Raghoji Bhangre in 1848. It is possible that the example of some of these may have inspired the young Phule.[12]

It is likely that the following year, 1848, was very much a turning-point in the young Phule's intellectual development. This was the year in which he first encountered the work of Thomas Paine in depth. Writing about this much later in his work *Slavery*, published in 1873, he said that he had been first introduced to Paine's work by some anti-British Brahmans in Pune. These Brahmans had sought to persuade the young students of the necessity of all castes uniting to win back control of their own political affairs, and had used Paine's arguments to urge their case. Following this, Phule described how he made a closer study of Paine's books for himself, and realised their potential for radicalism of a very different kind.[13]

There is another story, which Phule's biographers date to the same year, and which they argue to have had a profound effect on him. He had been invited in 1848 to the marriage party of a Brahman friend. Whilst walking along with the marriage procession, at which he was one of the very few non-Brahmans present, he was recognised as a Mali and a *Shudra* and roughly rebuked for daring to take part in a Brahman ceremony. He returned home, deeply shaken, to question his father about the traditional social values that lay behind the incident. His father advised him that the relative degree of social liberty enjoyed by the lower castes was a very recent phenomenon, and recounted the punishments that such a social misdemeanour would have incurred under the rule of the Brahman peshwas. He also described the more general social disabilities then inflicted on the lower castes and untouchables, and advised his son not to take such risks again.[14] If this story has a basis in fact, it has almost certainly been embroidered, both by Phule himself and his biographers. However, an incident of that kind would not be inconsistent with what we know of Phule's intellectual development during the year. We do know that it was in 1848 that he visited the American mission school for low caste girls in Ahmadnagar, and

12 Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley*, pp. 15–16.
13 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 135.
14 Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley*, pp. 17–20; Patil, *Mahatma Phule*, pp. 20–4.

following its example, opened the first of his schools for girls in Pune in the same year.[15] This would suggest a definite shift of emphasis away from hostility to the British, on Phule's part, towards a concern with social problems seen as the consequence of social and religious practices badly in need of reform. For the marriage procession incident itself to have taken place would also be quite in keeping with our knowledge of Phule's experience. It may have been that Phule's period at Murray Mitchell's school had accustomed him to a much greater degree of social freedom and indifference to caste divisions than he was likely to find consistently in Pune society at large. His first independent experiences in the latter as a young adult almost certainly resulted in clashes, of which this incident could have been an example.

We also have some evidence of Phule's religious position during this period. This seems to have been formed by the potent combination of Christian missionary propaganda and European religious radicalism. Krshnarao Arjun Keluskar, a colleague and personal friend of Phule's much later, in the 1880s, described his impression of Phule's early religious attitudes:

> Many educated people at that time thought that the Christian religion was better than their own religion, and some people even became Christian themselves. But Jotiba and his friends did not become Christians. The reason for this was that they had obtained one or two books from a very great revealer of the truth from America. This man was Thomas Paine.

Phule and his friends, Valavekar and Vasudev Babaji Navarange 'learned these books off by heart'. Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* exercised a particular influence:

> In the *Age of Reason*, the evidence for the falseness of Christianity is made clear. And it was simply that its priests were making frantic efforts to give arguments in support of it. This was what Thomas Paine showed. He said that God is one, and in understanding his existence the Bible is worthless, and that there is never any need for an intermediary in order to worship him. So Jotirao and his friends saw that the Christian religion was without justification.[16]

15 A girls' boarding school had been established in 1838 by the American missionaries at Ahmadnagar. By 1846, there were 100 resident girls, mainly Christian: William Hazen, *A Century in India: a Historical Sketch of the Marathi Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1813–1913*, Bombay 1913, p. 34. The school was run by Cynthia Farrar, the first single woman to go to Ahmadnagar, who arrived in December 1827 with the explicit aim of establishing schools for girls. See Charlotte Dennett Staelin, 'The Influence of Missions on Women's Education in India: the American Marathi Mission in Ahmadnagar, 1830–1930', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1977. Phule's visit to Ahmadnagar is recorded in a statement made on Phule's behalf at the public examination of one of the low caste schools, printed in the *Dnyanodaya*, 15 December 1853.

16 K. A. Keluskar to P. S. Patil, Bombay, 24 April 1930, P. S. Patil MSS, unpaginated, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

Phule's friendship with Vasudev Babaji Navarange was an early example of the kind of mixing of ideological with business interests that was to form a prominent characteristic of the membership of lower caste political organisations later in the century. This friendship is further testimony to his deist religious position, and further, to a possible link with the Paramahansa Mandali. The links between Phule and Navarange were close. Navarange had been the publisher of the first edition of Tukaram Tatya Padaval's *Jatibhed Vivekasar*, in 1861. Phule's name appears as the publisher of the second edition, which came out in 1865. Navarange went to London in 1863 to make contacts for the sale of metal casting equipment, and made Phule his agent in Pune, to the latter's great financial benefit.[17] It was Navarange who published the Paramahansa text ascribed to Dadoba Pandurang, *A Discussion on Religion*, in 1868. As we shall see, this book, with Phule's own writings, was to become an important text in Phule's efforts at political organisation in the 1870s. In 1869, Navarange undertook to sell copies of Phule's *A Ballad of Shivaji* at his shop in Bombay.[18] Another indication from the 1860s of earlier links between Phule and the Pune branch of the Paramahansa Mandali is Phule's dedication of the ballad written in 1869 in praise of Shivaji to Balakrshna Jayakar, the president of the Mandali, 'as a Mark of Profound Respect and a Testimony of Sincere Affection'.[19]

The experience of friends and contemporaries

Phule's childhood friend and colleague, Moro Viththal Valavekar has left a very valuable account of his own and his friends' religious attitudes while they were at school. This circle almost certainly included the young Phule. The ideas that Valavekar describes point to the strong influence both of Christian missionary propaganda, and of the idea of a natural and universal religion, basic to human nature everywhere, that was clearly the product of European religious radical arguments. Valavekar recalls that he had found most striking in the missionary teaching the urge to reform Hindu society and to do good to his countrymen. But Christian beliefs had been unacceptable as an absolute system of values:

17 ibid.

18 The book is advertised on the title page as available from Navarange's shop in Kalabadevi Road in Bombay. Navarange later became a member of the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj and of the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay. He married a Brahman widow and was thrown out of caste. *Dnyanodaya*, 15 October 1870.

19 Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, Bombay 1869 (Marathi), Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 4.

Even while I was a student, my implicit faith in Hindu dharma left me, and my mind turned towards the Christian religion, and I even thought that it would be right to become a Christian. But I thought that in accepting a new religion, you should decide by comparing it to the old religion. In this way, while making my study of the Christian religion, it appeared that, like our own religion, there were some things that had to be taken on faith.

This led him and his friends to a position very close to that of the radicals in the Paramahansa Mandali: 'So we circle of friends who were studying the Christian religion decided that, just as there are differences of opinion on many things, and people cannot agree on them, so it was not possible to say about any religion that in very truth it had been given by God.' In some points, the principles of all religions were similar. 'The fundamental precepts of all religions are the same, and we know what these are from our basic powers of distinguishing between right and wrong. Because this natural religion is met with everywhere, it must be true.' This decided Valavekar and his friends upon a position that identified itself with no specific religious confession:

The essence of this was that there was one God, and we should worship him; and we should conduct our behaviour according to the moral principles that are respected everywhere. The main truth was that doing good to others was virtue, and harming others was sin. Having decided on these general religious principles, we did not act further on our plan to become Christians.[20]

The Christian convert Baba Padmanji, whose experiences were discussed in the last chapter, has left a detailed description of the progressive stages by which he lost his faith in conventional Hinduism. He had received his early education at the high school of the London Missionary Society in Belgaum. In 1848, at the age of 18, he went to the Institution of the Free Church of Scotland in Bombay. He gives us a detailed account of his religious ideas at that time. Most of these concerning the Hindu religion were drawn from the moral tales and the deities described in the *puranas*. He knew nothing of the Vedas or Vedantic beliefs. His beliefs were catholic, covering a wide assortment of Hindu gods, drawn both from local traditions, such as Khandoba, and from all-India accounts such as the figure of Rama. He believed in the magical powers of *mantras*, *bhuts* or evil spirits, in the idea of *muhurts* or auspicious moments based on the movements of the planets,

20 *Parag*, February 1949, p. 26. Moro Viththal Valavekar later edited the *Indu Prakash* (English/Marathi) and *Native Opinion* (English/Marathi) newspapers, and was a founder member of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj and editor of the *Subodh Patrika* (Marathi). K. A. Keluskar records Valavekar, as editor of the *Subodh Patrika*, telling him to prepare a translation of the *Age of Reason* and *The Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine. K. A. Keluskar to P. S. Patil, Bombay, 24 April 1930. P. S. Patil MSS, unpaginated, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

and in magical omens. He did not think of religions as true or false, but regarded the Hindu religion as that of his ancestors and his caste, and felt that all religions were true for those that worshipped them. He believed gods really inhabited the stone idols that he worshipped with his family. He thought that Brahmans, saints, gurus, and itinerant holy men were all to be venerated, and that virtue was to be derived from their blessing, rather than from the individual's conduct.[21]

After six months at the Free Church of Scotland Institution, Padmanji was thinking in terms of a single Creator of all existing things, 'Sri Jagadguru', whose defining principle was his opposition to all forms of impurity.[22] Having lost his belief in all forms of magic, Padmanji came across the evidence against idol worship, and found it convincing.[23] For some time after losing his faith in these aspects of conventional religion, he retained his belief in the Vedas, believing them to be given by God. He did not know what was in them, but he understood from what people said that they were not idolatrous. Then he got hold of a copy of H. H. Wilson's translation of the first part of the *Rgveda*, and saw that it was concerned with celebrating the Sun, the Moon, and Indra, and gave no indication of being from God as Padmanji then envisaged him. At the same time, he read an article in the *Calcutta Review*, reprinted in the *Dnyanodaya* missionary newspaper, which proved conclusively that the Vedas could be dated historically just like any other human artefact. He read the other translations of the Vedas as they came into India from Europe, and so felt the last pillar of his faith in Hinduism disappear.[24]

Padmanji's circle of friends were very important during every stage of this loss of faith. He described their sense of joint excitement and adventure when, full of hope for the reform of Hindu society, they studied the accounts of Martin Luther and his struggles for religious reform in Europe: 'We felt as though we ourselves were living in Luther's time, and suffered his pains and rejoiced at his victories: and were inspired ourselves by his struggle against the Pope.'[25] This comparison between the struggles for religious reform in Maharashtra, and the work of Martin Luther in the German reformation, first made in protestant missionary writings, was to become a common theme

21 Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, Bombay 1888 (Marathi), pp. 127–42.

22 ibid., pp. 146–8. 23 ibid., pp. 372–3.

24 ibid., pp. 196–98. Padmanji later wrote the Marathi tract, *What is in the Veda?*, for the Bombay Tract and Book Society, which was first published in 1880. This clearly reflected Padmanji's own experiences with the Vedas in that he hoped that other Hindus, discovering their contents for the first time, might feel a similar weakening of their beliefs.

25 Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, p. 156.

amongst religious reformers, and one that was used frequently by Phule and his colleagues. It was Padmanji's discussion circle in the college who persuaded him to join the Paramahansa Mandali,[26] and when he left it, convinced that God had given man a specific revelation, it was with college friends that he set up the small Satyashodhak Sabha, or 'Truth-Seeking Society'. The society met every Sunday, said prayers and had a discussion about religion, and read the Bible and other religious texts.[27]

Padmanji's explanation of the broader decline of faith in these areas of Maharashtrian society, given in a letter to the *Dhumaketu* newspaper outlining the causes of his own conversion in 1854, attributed it to the new education available under British rule. Significantly, however, he argued that it was not merely the education of the missionaries, but that in the government schools also. He cited as an example the Paramahansa Mandali, with its membership drawn heavily from the students of Elphinstone College in Bombay.[28] Padmanji's conviction points again to the importance of the interaction between the ideas of protestant missionaries and those of European religious radicals.

Krshnarao Ratnaji Sangle, another convert, has left a remarkably detailed account of his religious experiences, which also give us an insight into the kinds of conflicts and pressures that might have affected Phule.[29] Sangle, born about 1840 into a Sali or weaver caste family of moderate means in Ahmadnagar, first attended the American mission school in the town, and then the government English school. Like Valavekar and Padmanji, Sangle's first dissatisfaction with conventional religion arose during his participation in a small discussion group at school. A Sali friend, Laksmanraoji Mahatekar, who was at the government Marathi school, invited him to a gathering of students there, and he attended regularly thereafter to discuss the Christian religion. They were joined by a Brahman, Vasudev Daji Kukade, and another Sali, Savalaramaji Navaji Satapute, and they formed their own society for debate. There was a similar discussion group amongst the boys in the first English class, who were older than they were.[30]

Significantly, Sangle's loss of faith followed a course very similar to that described by Padmanji. He broke caste in secret by eating bread and milk with his reformist student friends. At the same time, he lost his belief in the worship of idols. He described how, as the youngest

26 ibid., pp. 173–5. 27 ibid., p. 196. 28 ibid., p. 367.

29 This unpublished manuscript is in the possession of Shri Bhaskarrao Jadhav of Sadhu Vasavani Road, Pune. It is unpaginated. References here are to the titles of the different sections into which the MS is divided. This manuscript is in Marathi.

30 MS chapter entitled 'The first beginnings of my turning away from Hinduism'.

male in the family, it fell to him to wash and anoint the family's numerous gods, and how all he could feel in this duty was distaste at the smell of the carefully preserved Ganges water that was kept for this purpose. He felt convinced that it was wrong to worship either a principle of nature or a part of it in the form of stone or metal images. He and his friends agreed that belief in *bhuts*, devil and spirit possession, and in the holding of festivals on holy days and of pilgrimages to sacred rivers, was founded simply in popular ignorance.[31]

This breakdown in belief was followed by a long period of secret visits with his friends to the bungalow of one of the missionaries, in a search for religious truth. Some of the stories he related from this period reveal a strong anti-Brahman feeling. At the funeral of his brother, who had been bitten by a rabid dog, he refused in front of the gathered family to drink *tirtha*, water made holy for the occasion by the officiating Brahman dipping his right toe into it. He explained to his distressed mother that it was no dishonour to refuse to drink water made dirty by the Brahman's foot. When giving the Brahman his *daksina*, or payment in money, the priest demanded that the money should first be soaked in the holy water, since unsoaked money would burn his hand. So, Sangle argued, 'in doing these kinds of things, the deceitful Brahmans mislead the people'.[32]

Sangle's explanation of his final decision to convert to Christianity in 1860 strongly recalled missionary arguments about the proper role of a religious text in the life of the individual believer. These arguments represented a set of unspoken assumptions to which Hindu apologists never addressed themselves consistently or in any number. Sangle attributed his decision to the fact that no Hindu could describe accurately what his religion was, because of the countless texts, gods, and traditions that it possessed, its assimilation of Muslim ideas along with a primitive belief in different forms of magic.[33] Sangle clearly felt the need for a text and a lucid set of beliefs which would guide him in his everyday conduct.

Low caste education and the emergence of an individual radicalism

In 1848, Phule and his student colleagues turned to the reform of traditional Hindu society as the most important single issue for the

31 MS chapter entitled 'I shun the worship of idols'.
32 MS chapter entitled 'The death of Namadev'. Namadev was Sangle's brother.
33 MS chapter entitled 'Our religion is Hindu – but should we call it Hindu, or pure Arya?'

socially concerned. In education, they thought, lay the key to a fundamental change in social attitudes. After visiting the female schools belonging to the American mission in Ahmadnagar Phule opened a school for girls of the low and untouchable castes in Pune and undertook the task of teaching himself.[34] The project was beset with difficulties. Phule's father turned him and his wife, Savitribai, out of the house when he refused to give up the scheme; it was so difficult to find female teachers for the schools that Savitribai herself took on the task, having been first coached by the social reformer and member of the Paramahansa Mandali, Keshav Shivaram Bhavalakar.[35] The scheme was chronically short of money, relying on labour and contributions from Phule and his friends, and the charity of individual European administrators;[36] and it was often difficult to persuade the lower castes of the value of education for their children. Despite these problems, and with a grant of Rs. 75 a month from the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, several more schools were founded in Pune in the next four years.

The arguments for female and low caste education given by Phule and his colleagues reflect strongly the view of India as a society materially and intellectually impoverished. In 1852, the Board of Education recommended to the Bombay government that some mark of honour be conferred upon Phule for his labours in the cause of education, and as a result Phule was presented with a pair of shawls, a gift traditionally bestowing merit, in a public ceremony, by Major Thomas Candy, the principal of Pune College.[37] He replied thanking the government for the honour:

What I may have done towards furthering the cause of educating native females is indeed too little and falls far short even of the demands of duty as one of the

34 I am not here giving all the details of the schools administered by Phule and the managing committee set up in 1853. An account of the details of their operation is in a Report of the Female Schools in Poona from the Educational Inspector, Deccan Division. *Bombay Public Consultations, General Department*, 12 April 1856, no. 670 of 1856.

35 *Bombay Guardian*, 28 November 1851, quoted in D. Keer *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley*, p. 28.

36 In a meeting held in September 1853, Phule and his colleagues voted their thanks to a very wide variety of sources for their support: to the Board of Education, the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, Mr Rivers, Mr Fairbank, Mr Farrar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Vamanrao Janardan Ranade, the *Dnyanprakash* (Marathi) and the *Vartamandipika* (Marathi) newspapers. Reported in the *Dnyanodaya*, 15 July 1855.

37 The presentation was reported in the *Bombay Guardian*, 26 November 1852. It was said to have caused displeasure amongst the Pune conservatives: 'It appears that many of the old school Brahmans are displeased that a presentation of shawls should have been made to a Sudra (Joti Govind Rao is a gardener by caste, although not by occupation); the Brahmans maintain that a man of his rank should receive the lower reward of money.'

sons of the beloved land. It is to your benevolent and philanthropic desires to create a noble and generous ambition among the youths of this country and to see India raise her now abject head and occupy a place among the civilised nations of the earth that I owe these honours.[38]

The failure to educate women in particular was seen as the prime cause of India's decline. The Marathi Address at the Second Annual Examination of the female schools in Pune on 12 February 1853 castigated traditional attitudes towards women in these terms:

In their opinion, women should forever be kept in obedience, should not be given any knowledge, should not be well educated, should not know about religion, should not mix with men, and they bring out extracts from our Shastras in which women are so deprecated in support of these idiotic beliefs, and ask whether anything written by the great and learned sages be untrue.[39]

In 1853, Phule fell ill and was unable to continue the work of teaching himself, so he formed his colleagues into the 'Society for increasing education amongst Mahars, Mangs, and others'. Sadashiv Ballal Govande was its president, Valavekar its secretary, Sakharam Yasavant Paranjape, another school friend, its treasurer, and Phule a member of the committee.[40] The Society opened two more schools for untouchables, and gave lectures to the Mahars and Mangs of Pune explaining the benefits of education. As in the arguments advanced earlier when Phule led the project, the committee emphasised the general backwardness of Hindu society as the cause of the sufferings of the lower castes, rather than attributing these to any particular social group. In a letter to the Bombay government asking for money to build a proper school house and for land to build it on, Valavekar explained the miserable condition of the lower castes, 'sunk deep in ignorance and misery, arising from want of education and intercourse with society in general, as the rest of the castes of Natives have excluded them from these benefits'.[41] The committee even felt that the idleness of Mahars and Mangs was partly to blame for their condition.[42]

At this point in the affairs of the committee, it is possible to see the first signs of the emergence of Phule's own distinctive form of

38 Jotirao Phule to Viscount Falkland, 22 November 1852, *Bombay Public Consultations, General Department*, 22–31 December 1852, No. 10053 of 1852.

39 Reported in the *Dnyanodaya*, 1 April 1853. In the same address the committee thanked Mr Lumsden of the Judicial Department, and another British official, who visited the first female school and donated Rs 100, and another European, Mr Brown, who gave Rs 100 to the school to buy prizes for the girls.

40 Reported in the *Dnyanodaya*, 15 September 1853.

41 Moro Viththal Valavekar to Viscount Falkland, 16 December 1853, *Bombay Public Consultations, General Department*, 13–30 September 1854, nos. 5411 to 5417 of 1854.

42 Report of the formation of the 'Society for increasing education amongst Mahars, Mangs, and others', printed in the *Dnyanodaya*, 15 July 1855.

radicalism. There is evidence that he took issue with other members of the committee over the extent to which Brahmans as a caste might be held responsible both for the condition of the low castes, and for the backwardness of Hindu society itself. Writing much later, in the early 1870s, Phule attributed his rift with the Brahman members of the committee to their divergent ideas on the education of the lower castes. While the committee thought that they should be given only the basic skills of reading and writing, Phule felt that 'they should be given a thorough education, and get from it the power to distinguish between good and bad'.[43]

There is also evidence that the extent of Brahman responsibility for the ills of Hindu society was the issue over which they quarrelled, and that Phule was taking an increasingly extreme stand on this. An article in the *Dnyanprakash* newspaper praised Phule for his efforts in education, and said that it believed that the higher castes, under the influence of Brahmans, had been responsible for the deprivation of low castes. However, the writer of the article argued, Phule was mistaken in representing Brahmans as being the sole cause of the problem.[44]

Some correspondence in the *Dnyanodaya* of this period also gives us a very valuable insight into the development of Phule's ideas, and in particular into the tone of the teaching that the committee found hard to accept. In February 1855, the paper published a letter from a Christian convert who had recently visited one of the schools for untouchables in Pune. There, Phule had got a 14-year-old girl of the Mang caste to read out an essay to the visitor, who said that the essay clearly demonstrated the fruits of Phule's hard labour for the untouchables. The girl had studied with Phule for three years. Her essay was long and ferocious in its condemnation of Brahmans. She described in minute detail the sufferings of the untouchables under the Brahman government of the peshwas, as she had heard it from her parents' own lips. In particular, she singled out the elitism of Brahmanic religious values: these constituted 'a religion that one person alone can enjoy, while the rest of mankind looks on with hungry faces'. Their motives were not hard to find:

> The people who dress themselves up and parade round in their purity have only one intention, and that is to think that they are more pure than other people, and they feel happy at this; but do their cruel hearts ever feel any pity at the suffering that we endure that the very touch of our hands pollutes them?

43 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 141.

44 *Dnyanprakash*, 5 December 1853, referred to in Keer, *Mahatama Jotirao Phooley*, p. 69.

Even reformist Brahmans were not spared. One of the fruits of a proper education – and here this is almost certainly the 'thorough education' that Phule spoke of – was that it enabled the low caste individual to realise that 'those who have been educated in pure schools, and who are called reformed, and who are so clever, but who from time to time commit deeds so evil they would make your hair stand on end – it is these who are the real Mangs and Mahars'.[45]

Having quarrelled with his colleagues in 1853, Phule took a job as a part-time teacher in 1854 in the Scottish mission's school for female boarders in the mission compound. His recruitment was reported:

> We have been happy in securing the aid in their instruction (for nearly four hours a day) one of the most zealous and accomplished teachers in Pune – Jotee Govind Rao Phoolay – a Native Philanthropist, whose persevering efforts on behalf of the education of females and the low castes have called forth the warmest commendation of the Board of Education and of Government itself. He has fulfilled our highest expectations; the progress of the girls has been most satisfactory.[46]

It is also clear that Phule had maintained his contact with the Scottish missionaries over the period since he had left school, and that he had used the mission facilities in the course of his own educational work. Murray Mitchell recorded an incident in the mission English school, similar to the disturbance that he had reported in 1842, in which Phule had had a hand:

> My worthy friend, Jotiba Govindrao Phooley, a remarkable man who has laboured hard to benefit the Mhars – who are of the lowest caste, or rather of no caste at all – one day sent a Mhar boy to us. He was found sufficiently acquainted with the vernacular to allow us to receive him into the lowest English class.[47]

Murray Mitchell described how the Brahmans in the school had objected *en masse* to the presence of the Mahar boy, threatening to desert the school if he were not removed. Murray Mitchell was saved from his dilemma by the Mahar boy himself, who never came back to the school after the protest.

45 *Dnyanodaya*, 15 February and 1 March 1855. This theme of the sufferings of untouchables under the last peshwa Bajirao II recurs frequently in the arguments of low caste and untouchable activists well into the twentieth century. Obviously a highly emotive subject, this had become established in folk memory by the mid-nineteenth century. Thereafter it provided a powerful subject for polemic, not only for untouchables themselves, but for any lower caste writer seeking to give emotional appeal to arguments against conventional religious hierarchies.

46 *Oriental Christian Spectator*, February 1855.

47 Murray Mitchell, *In Western India: Recollections of My Early Missionary Life*, Edinburgh 1899, pp. 314–15.

6
Christianity and the attack on caste in Phule's early writing

Introduction: *The Third Eye*

Phule did not intend his distinctive focus upon Brahmans, and Brahmanic religion, as the ultimate cause of the deprivations of the lower castes to remain a matter of private disagreement between himself and his colleagues. In 1855, setting a pattern that he was to follow throughout his life, he described his position in detail in a polemical tract, a play entitled *The Third Eye*.[1] In this play, he rejected decisively the view that the sufferings of the lower castes were the product of a social system supported by all except untouchable castes, whose own backwardness was a part of the problem.

The subject of the play was the exploitation of an ignorant and superstitious peasant couple by a cunning Brahman priest, and their subsequent enlightenment by a Christian missionary. It clearly set out the argument that Hindu religion represented both an ideological imposition upon the lower castes and, in its insistence on ritual and ceremony, a cause of their material impoverishment. At the same time, Phule made this issue much wider and more overtly political by relating it to some of the social effects of British rule. He was concerned in particular with the use of education and the skills of literacy as a vital social resource that conferred great power on Brahman social groups. They formed by far the largest proportion of those in the new vernacular schools and government English schools, and in the new administrative, educational, judicial, and revenue institutions of the Raj. The result was a virtual monopoly by Brahmans of the strategic position of administrative intermediaries between the British government and the masses of Hindu society. This represented a formidable extension of traditional Brahman prerogatives over certain occupations and skills, and the religious authority on which this was based. Their

1 No copies of this play were thought to have survived until 1979, when three manuscript copies were found in the papers of P.S. Patil, the author of the first major biography written on Phule, published in 1927. These papers are now in the library of Shivaji University, Kolhapur. All references here to the text of the play are taken from the first published edition, in the journal *Purogami Satyashodhak* (Marathi), vol. 5, no. 2, April–June 1979.

common social, occupational, and religious experience conferred, moreover, a unity of interest upon Brahman social groups, which made it likely that they would act to support each other in spheres far removed from the religious. Where Phule differed from his colleagues, and where he drew together religious and political relationships within western Indian society to form his own distinctive brand of anticlericalism, was to regard Hindu religion as the worldview of specifically Brahman social groups. This worldview served Brahman interests both in matters of religious authority and in the secular spheres of administrative power, occupational competition, and the ability itself to comprehend the realities of political relationships within society. Although other castes might accept it, Brahmanic religion could represent for them only a false consciousness and an unknowing servitude to the interests of Brahmans themselves.

The title of the play, *Tratiya Ratna*, *The Third Eye*, has a double allusion. The first is probably to the third eye of Shiva in the centre of his forehead, whose use implies great anger and fury.[2] The second is almost certainly to the description, by the social reformer Gopal Hari Deshmukh, of the new kinds of education available since the introduction of East India Company rule as endowing those who received it with a 'third eye' giving them new modes of perception and new ideas and information with which to understand Indian society.[3] Phule attempted to get the work published by sending it to the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, which had just been instituted for the encouragement of Marathi language and literature as part of Mountstuart Elphinstone's reform of the existing institution of *daksina*, money paid as charity to learned Brahmans under the government of the peshwas. However, the Committee rejected the play, and so it was not published.[4]

2 Molesworth's *Marathi–English Dictionary* gives *tratiya netra ughadane*, literally 'to open the third eye' as referring to the third eye of Shiva in the centre of his forehead, and translates it as 'to flash forth fury; to be in a high rage'. It is possible that Phule also intended to reflect this meaning, since the work is written as a passionate protest.

3 See the introduction to the first published edition by S. Raykar, in *Purogami Satyashodhak*, vol. 5, no. 2, April–June 1979, p. 6. *Tratiya Ratna* means 'the third jewel'. However, one copy of the manuscript play was called '*Tratiya Netra*', 'The Third Eye', and it is probable that this was the meaning that Phule intended to convey.

4 Phule tells us in his short book *Slavery* that he submitted the play to the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, but that the preponderance of Brahmans on the committee resulted in its rejection, so that it was not published. Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 139. I have not been able to find out whether the play was ever actually performed. The fact that three copies had been made suggests that the text was actually passed around amongst Phule's circle. An internal reference on page 24 of the play suggests that Phule hoped that it would be staged: the commentator urges the audience 'if you should read or listen to this debate' to take heed of his warning of the treachery of Brahmans. It may be that Phule hoped to convey his message to an illiterate audience by staging the work.

In the form in which it was published in 1979, the play is thirty-eight pages in length. Its cast consists of a Brahman priest, a poor cultivator and his wife, a Christian missionary, and a commentator who seems to represent Phule's own view. The plot is fairly simple. The Brahman priest visits the pregnant wife of the cultivator as she sits alone at home. He tells her that an unfortunate conjunction of the zodiac threatens the life of her unborn child. In order to avert the danger, she and her husband will have to perform certain ceremonies of propitiation, as well as give a feast to a large number of Brahmans. By this and similar devices he extracts grain and money from the couple. The character of the priest as Phule portrays him is not a pleasant one. He treats his patron the cultivator with the utmost contempt, playing on his ignorance and fear in his own greed for money and good food. The cultivator and his wife accept their lot with resignation, and regard the payments to the Brahman to protect their family as their *karma*. Already poverty-stricken, they resort to the moneylender to pay for the feasts and ceremonies.

After the feast, at which the Brahmans keep the cultivator and his wife waiting in the hot sun and spare them only a few leftovers, the pair happen to hear a Christian missionary preaching by the roadside, and begin a discussion with him. The missionary convinces the cultivator that God was not to be found in a stone idol such as he had just thrown himself into debt to propitiate, nor were divine powers to be found vested in any particular social group. Instead, the missionary points to the true God as the Creator of the earth and all existing things, who stood firmly detached both from the social order and from objects in the natural world. The cultivator's anger grows as he realises that the Brahman has deceived and robbed him in the name of non-existent gods and planetary forces, and sees that generations of poor and ignorant men like himself have been exploited in the same way. By means of the commentator in the play, Phule argues that this age-old injustice is not the result merely of the greed of individual Brahmans, but resembled more a deliberate conspiracy, in which generations of Brahmans had been involved, to maintain the fiction of Brahmanic religious authority enshrined in the sacred books of the Hindus and given the additional force of custom. They owned their success to the denial of any form of literacy or learning to the *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras*, the untouchable castes. The play concludes with the cultivator and his wife thanking the missionary for having exposed the hollowness of all Brahman pretensions, and resolving to educate themselves at Phule's own night school, since in education and knowledge lay the key to a true understanding of their own society, of events in the world, and of the real natures of God and men.

Religious attitudes, social resources, and social control

As the guardians of existing Hindu beliefs and institutions, Phule held Brahmans in large part responsible for the ignorance of the lower castes and for their deference to a religious authority without foundation. In the play, during the exchanges between the Brahman and the cultivator, the commentator interjects:

> The Brahmans have for a long time impressed upon the minds of the Malis and kunbis, with the display of their writings and powers, that the Shudras should never transgress the orders of the Brahmans, and if any of them thought that this was not true, they were told to go and look at the books of Manu and the deeds of Parashuram, which would confirm them in the proper belief.[5]

The cultivator explains how this control of the skills of literacy had worked in his own village:

> All of the Brahmans would secretly give advice to the Malis and kunbis not to send their children to school or would put the fear of the kulkarni into them, so was it not difficult for their children to learn?[6]

He makes no distinction between Brahmans, identifying the Brahman priest serving his own family with previous generations of Brahmans, and remonstrates with the priest: 'Didn't you Brahman people always tell our mothers and fathers that there was no authority in the laws of Manu for them to learn to write, so what could they do?'[7]

The effects of Hindu religious attitudes and social regulations on the low castes provides Phule's main point of concern in the play. The traditional and highly conservative ideas of *karma* and *dharma*, the ideological underpinning of the social divisions of *jati* and *varna*, had retained their central position in the religious worldview of the common man. This had produced the social stagnation clear both in the deference and resignation of the cultivator, and in the Brahman's inability to change his conviction of his own religious superiority. The reality of life for the cultivator is his *karma*. He reassures the priest, who has refused to help him carry the food for the feast since he is in a state of ritual purity: 'It doesn't matter, Maharaj, this is the fulfilment of my destiny, and I must bear it while there is breath in my body.'[8] His wife defends her husband for failing to address the priest in the proper manner: 'Whatever we do, we are of the kunbi caste; we ought to stay in our place behind the plough.'[9] Neither have they any sense of themselves as individuals, only as links within the great chain of generations. The cultivator wearily agrees to pay for the feast: 'What should I do if I did not agree? What is the point of our domestic life, if it

5 Jotirao Phule, *The Third Eye*, *Purogami Satyashodhak*, p. 29.
6 ibid., p. 31. The *kulkarni* was the village accountant, and always a Brahman.
7 ibid., p. 34. 8 ibid., p. 22. 9 ibid., p. 17.

is not for our children?'[10] Phule is sharply aware of the crucial role played in the transmission of traditional culture and religious attitudes by women, shown also in his early concern for women's education. It is through the cultivator's wife that the priest chooses to work, and she who takes fright and cajoles her husband into doing as the priest asks. Her ignorance of the consequences of debt makes her regard the moneylender as the easy solution, despite her husband's misgivings.[11] The priest and his wife are shown equally constrained by the traditions of their own caste. The priest congratulates his wife for having insisted that they choose the guests for the *kunbi*'s feast 'because whose wife are you? If we Brahmans weren't born to think up schemes like this, then you could say that we were born for nothing.'[12]

Having described the cultivators' submissiveness to the religious authority of the priest, Phule went on to suggest that as a result of their common position in the religious hierarchy, Brahmans in all walks of life tended to share the same attitudes to the lower castes, and to collaborate with each other to preserve both their traditional prerogatives and the new administrative and occupational advantages that these had brought. Phule feared that the traditional educational disabilities of the low castes would be confirmed and reinforced by the very administrative structures of British rule. He envisaged the formation of a layer of western-educated Brahman officials and adminstrators, from the village *pantoji* or schoolteacher, who would normally have been a Brahman, but now controlled the implementation of education schemes at village level, to the inspectors of education in the Department of Public Instruction.[13] The rise of such an administrative elite, not only in the Education Department, but in every area of administration that demanded clerical and professional skills, would convert the benefits of British rule into an unmitigated disaster as far as the lower castes were concerned. Phule regarded western education, with its emphasis on secular and rationalist truths about the external world, as the most potent of weapons for the liberation of the lower castes. In the emergence of a Brahman administrative elite, the latter would add to their traditional methods of social control the appropriation and monopolisation of the most effective means of bringing about a fundamental change in religious values. Not only would such an elite work to hold back the benefits of such an education from the low castes,

10 ibid., p. 15. 11 ibid., p. 18. 12 ibid., p. 23.

13 For an account of changes in the administrative structure of education in the Bombay Presidency during this period, and of the social origins of those in the new educational institutions as students, see E. M. Gumperz, 'English Education and Social Change in Late Nineteenth Century Bombay 1858–1898', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California, 1965, pp. 186–297.

but their very appropriation of western education, as their own administrative and professional style, would defuse the revolutionary potential of such an education, and blur the issues more than they would have been had reformers only the intransigently orthodox to deal with.

The cultivator expresses anger and frustration at the way in which Brahman teachers and officials subverted the education of the lower castes in the villages, despite the good work of well-disposed British administrators:

> I have heard that our Candy Saheb has prepared many teachers, and sent them from village to village to pass on their learning, but what is the use? All the Brahmans in these villages give secret advice to the kunbis and Malis not to send their children to school.[14]

He tries to correct an illusion which he felt had been created by Brahmans and unwittingly adopted by British administrators: that the low castes had no liking or aptitude for education. The missionary in the play is labouring under this impression, and at first regards the cultivator's illiteracy in this light, until he points out its real cause: the Brahman village schoolteacher's dislike of teaching lower caste children.[15] The cultivator goes on to suggest measures that would counteract this bias:

> Through the Government Board of Education a rule should be made that there should be an estimate of the Mali and kunbi population in every village, and that if the villagers did not allow a certain proportion of their children to fill up the school, then that school should be broken up.[16]

The cultivator also expressed the frustration felt by men like himself when their educational backwardness disqualified them from employment in the East India Company's administration:

> When the mamledars and other Brahman officials who, having been educated by you English, obtained high offices and swelled up with pride, we saw them, and do you think that we still agreed that we should not be allowed to educate ourselves? No! Always, we used to think that we might be educated and become important officials, but don't you know how the Brahman schoolteachers conspire to prevent us?[17]

14 Jotirao Phule, *The Third Eye*, *Purogami Satyashodhak*, p. 31. Thomas Candy had a long career – between 1822 and 1876 – in India, most of it in the educational administration of the Bombay Presidency. He was the first superintendent of the Pune *Pathashala* or College, then Principal of Deccan College, and finally chief Marathi translator to government. G. C. Bhate, *History of Modern Marathi Literature 1800–1938*, Pune 1939, p. 81.

15 Jotirao Phule, *The Third Eye*, *Purogami Satyashodhak*, p. 30.

16 ibid., p. 32. 17 ibid., p. 31.

The predominance of Brahmans at the lower levels of the administration removed even the opportunity for complaint: 'When will God arrange things so that all we people can go straight to the Sarkar and tell them, without any fear of you Brahmans?'[18] Nevertheless, Phule felt that the introduction of East India Company rule represented a unique opportunity for the lower castes. Education in particular represented the key to a new understanding of society. The cultivator warns the priest: 'When our people have become educated in the English Raj they will begin to understand things, and then they will not let one of you Brahmans carry on.'[19]

Their traditional religious disabilities thus lay at the root of the frustration and backwardness of the low castes under British rule. These interconnected problems required a radical solution: a revolution in the worldview of the lower caste individual. In stripping the Brahman of his religious authority, and the social hierarchies of Hinduism of their religious sanction, this would free the lower caste man or woman to understand for themselves both the workings of the natural world, and the distribution of power and authority in their own society.

Missionary arguments and religious radicalism

Against the fictitious world of Hindu religion, Phule tried to bring to bear a more powerful set of ideas about the individual and society, the relations between God and man, and the place of the sacred in the natural world. The dual influences traced in chapter 3 are strongly in evidence in Phule's ideas here, as he used Christian missionary arguments to produce a strong rejection of conventional Hindu beliefs, and what were in effect the ideas of European religious radicals, to stop short of accepting Christian or any other revealed religious doctrine in its place.

Phule put forward the notion of the divine as a single and unique being, the Creator of all existing things and the source of moral law for human society. A clear separation was made between sacred or divine forces, and the natural and social worlds. The natural world, bereft of magical significance, was left open to investigation by secular reason in all its empirical, scientific, and instrumental forms. The Creator might intervene in human social affairs as Providence. Indeed, the commentator in the play argues that the arrival of the British in India had been arranged by Providence for the relief of the lower castes. However, the separation between the two removed the religious sanction from the rules governing the hierarchies of Hindu society, and made it clear that

18 ibid., p. 35. 19 ibid., p. 36.

they were merely human constructs. The task of re-educating the cultivators is put in the hands of the missionary, who represents not only Christian values, but the concrete presence of an external power that might be persuaded to intervene actively in Indian society on behalf of the lower castes. Yet there is never any suggestion that the cultivators are to use these new ideas for anything but their own radical ends.

The missionary points out to the cultivators that the god Maruti, on whose propitiation they have just spent a large sum of money, is made of stone, and so clearly forms a part of the earth. He asks him whether such a great work as the earth could have produced itself, or whether a being other than it must have created it. The cultivators admit that the earth must have been produced by such a Creator, but baulk at the idea that he should be worshipped, since he was not perceptible to the senses. The missionary points out the impossibility of worshipping anything less, such as the god Maruti, since all things perceptible to the senses must have been created by the higher being. The cultivators are persuaded, and seeing that the god Maruti is only a stone, explode into anger:

> I can see now that this stone is not worthy of worship, and if I smashed it now and ground it into little pieces and mixed it with the earth and made rangoli patterns with it, then perhaps another credulous man like me would not listen to the Brahmans, be deceived in its name and fall headlong into debt.[20]

The commentator elaborates further on the nature of the Creator, arguing that he will act in human affairs to remedy injustice: 'All you Malis and kunbis, even Mangs and Mahars should not fear the Brahmans for a moment. For this purpose, God has sent the English into your country.' The purpose of this was 'to lift the ban on education which the Brahmans have imposed on the Shudras and ati-Shudras, to educate them and make them wise'.[21]

The potential of this ideological shift in the nature and location of the divine power needs hardly be emphasised. It carries the idea that God, as the unique Creator, constitutes the source of justice for human society. The traditional idea of *karma* had, of course, its own very strong notions of justice.[22] This had a considerable potential strength

20 ibid., pp. 28–9. Note the striking similarity of this to the missionary Robert Nesbit's account of his standard method of confronting idol-worshoppers, quoted in chapter 3. *Rangoli* are patterns made with coloured powders on the ground for decoration, especially on festive occasions.

21 ibid., pp. 35–6.

22 Max Weber, indeed, regarded the idea of *karma* in traditional theology as the most complete theodicy ever produced. *The Religion of India*, The Free Press, New York 1958, p. 21.

against attempts at social reform. But Phule set out to undermine the very idea of *karma* by projecting the Creator as a beneficent being who constituted an impartial court of appeal for essentially present causes. Justice on this view stems from a determinate and just Creator who is outside contemporary social arrangements, rather than consisting in those very social arrangements themselves, as the status of different individuals reflected their conduct in previous existences. In this way, the legitimation, in *karma*, for social divisions and hierarchies, collapses, and they appear as the mere constructs of self-interest. The world is not simply reduced thereby to conflicts of self-interest. Phule relocates the source of moral order within the beneficent deity. This time it is a moral order much closer to the Christian one, regarding the present life of the individual as the centre of moral concern, and all individuals as equal before their Creator. The idea of *dharma* was closely tied in with that of *karma*. Unless an individual believed that his present social position, for example, as a tiller of the soil, was part of a logical scheme in which his present life was only a small part, the concept of religious duty as the fixed adherence to this role lost its force.[23]

The idea of a separation between God and the external world potentially undermined conventional Hindu religion in other ways. The dichotomy between pure and impure was fundamental in the construction of the social hierarchies of Hinduism, and was perceived as inherent in the natural and social worlds.[24] By challenging the presence of any such magical properties in the external world, Phule challenged the basis of the social categories on which these rested. This rendered meaningless the intricate structure of ritual signification which convention demanded should be imposed on many actions and social exchanges, and which was in practice the means by which one social group distinguished itself from another, as in the exchange of food.

While Phule found missionary arguments very useful as models for his own critique of orthodox religion, he did not simply advocate conversion. He seems to have felt that it would be premature to lay down a fresh set of fixed ideas about the conduct of religious life. As the cultivator says: 'Until all these pretences have been broken down, our people will never be able to recognise properly who is the true God.'[25] This point also refers us back to the discussion groups that Phule's

23 For a general discussion of ideas of *dharma*, see Arnold Kunst, 'Use and Misuse of *dharma*' in W. D. O'Flaherty and J. Duncan M. Derrett (eds.), *The Concept of Duty in South Asia*, Vikas, Delhi 1979, pp. 3–17.

24 See Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, University of Chicago Press, 1970, chapter 2.

25 Jotirao Phule, *The Third Eye*, *Purogami Satyashodhak*, p. 35.

friend Valavekar described.[26] It is very likely that Phule also felt that as a revealed religion, Christianity suffered from some of the same defects as Hinduism.

The community of the lower castes

In place of the traditional social order, Phule did not merely envisage a collection of social atoms. He attempted to use traditional social categories in a new way. The lower caste man or woman who perceived the contradictions in their situation were not thereby isolated. Precisely this process of individual enlightenment served to integrate them into a new collective – that of the oppressed. Through the play, Phule summarised the community that he felt suffered a common oppression at the hands of Brahmans as 'Mali–*kunbi*' and 'Mang–Mahar', and in *varna* terms as *Shudra-ati-Shudra*. One of the aims of the play was to convince his audience that the heterogeneous collection of social groups that fell within these terms did, in fact, share common interests and a common social position. This was to be done by the ideological construction of a social grouping that would be both socially credible and attractive. The latter was particularly important, so that elite non-Brahman castes might not feel that they were losing by their association with traditionally low castes. This new social construct was to be the community of the oppressed itself, with its explanation of social evils in terms of the exploitation of all by one group, and its atmosphere of hope and striving for change.

As victims of conventional religious values, both 'clean' and untouchable castes belonged to this community, but Phule used different devices to convey their 'true' identities as members of it. In his treatment of 'clean' castes, he makes a skilful use of the ambiguities of caste divisions and statuses that were described in chapter 2. At the level of *jati*, he describes the main body of the community as 'Mali–*kunbi*'. In the mid-nineteenth century, the term *kunbi* was an imprecise but comprehensive social category denoting all those that worked on the land. The Mali caste, of whom Phule was a member, would have ranked close to the more respectable among the *kunbis* in ritual terms. In describing the 'clean' castes of the community of the oppressed in this way, Phule at once included his own caste, and linked them with the bulk of the rural population of western Maharashtra. In projecting this new community also as *Shudra*, Phule also touched upon the traditions of conflict that were described in chapter 2. He intended to provide a reminder of the Brahman denials of any but a low ritual

26 See chapter 5, pp. 113–14.

status to all castes other than Brahmans. At the same time, the term *Shudra* was imbued with a new and radical meaning. Against the background of Brahman injustice, it no longer connoted the socially and ritually base, but the community of the oppressed, who had by implication already recognised and rejected both the social categories of conventional Hindu belief, and the religious authority of its guardians.

Within this projected community of non-Brahman castes were also included Mahars and Mangs, the two major untouchable groups of western India. In place of the disabilities suffered by the *ati-Shudra* in the orthodox hierarchy, Phule gives him a central place in the fused group of the oppressed. The inclusion of untouchable groups forms the touchstone of a genuinely caste-free society. Moreover, Phule makes it clear that the despised position of the untouchable, and the deception of the cultivator, are a part of the same phenomenon. The commentator urges:

> Oh all you Malis and kunbis! If you read or listen to this debate, then it will be clear to you that you should rather let robbers fall onto your house than put your trust into a Brahman priest,

and he turns to the priest and tells him:

> You go and do a job of work, and you'll find that you will make a living in this world very well without insulting Mangs and Mahars.[27]

These attempts represented only the earliest and least sophisticated of Phule's efforts to convey a social identity for the community of lower castes that would be credible in terms of contemporary popular culture. This project was to remain his central concern as polemicist and ideologue, and forms the main subject of part 4.

27 Jotirao Phule, *The Third Eye*, *Purogami Satyashodhak*, p. 24.

PART 4

The creation of a lower caste identity in history and popular culture, 1869–73

7

Ritual status and political conflict in later nineteenth-century Maharashtra

New strategies for the attack on Brahman power

Following his retirement from the managing committee of the schools for the lower castes in 1858, Phule devoted himself in the early 1860s to a variety of social reform campaigns. He took part in the first attempts in Pune to liberalise attitudes towards the remarriage of widows.[1] In 1863 he made an even bolder move with the opening of a 'Home for the prevention of infanticide'. Here, high caste widows who had become pregnant could come and give birth in secret and return quietly to their families, leaving the babies at the home. Posters and handbills advertised the home, which quickly collected about thirty-five infants. The survival rate amongst the children was very poor, however, and Phule's great-nephew Gajananrao reported that most of them died before the age of five.[2] Phule and his wife Savitribai, without children of their own, adopted one of these, a boy named Yashavantrao, the son of a Brahman widow.

Phule supported these efforts by setting up in business. He had inherited a small amount of money from his father's second wife, which he invested in a metalwork shop in Pune. He became the agent for his friend Vasudev Babaji Navarange, who had been to London in 1863 to make contacts for the sale of metal-casting equipment.[3] Phule built up a great trade selling this equipment to factories in Pune. He employed two servants at his shop, which grew to a daily turnover of about Rs 100[4]. This business laid the foundation for the material prosperity which later enabled Phule to devote himself to the lower caste cause.

Between 1869 and 1873 Phule entered on a major new period of

1 The *Dnyanprakash* newspaper of 12 March 1860 reported the marriage of a widower and a widow of the Shenavi caste. Phule may have supported this effort: see D. Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, p. 86.

2 Gajananrao Ganpatrao Phule to P. S. Patil, Bombay, 15 April 1930, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

3 See pp. 112–13.

4 Mahadu Sahadu Vaghole to P. S. Patil, Pune, 18 November 1940. P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

literary and polemical activity. In these crucial four years he constructed a new critique of orthodox religion, and the social structures that it had helped to produce in western Indian society under British rule. This provided the ideological basis for the rest of his life's work and sketched out the framework within which the non-Brahman movement was later to conduct its debates.

The three major works of this period were, in order of their publication, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, published in June 1869 in Bombay; *Priestcraft Exposed*, published later in the same year, and *Slavery*, published in 1873. He also wrote a much smaller piece, *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department*, which was published in the Christian journal *Satyadipika* in June 1869.

A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale consisted ostensibly of a celebration of the exploits of the seventeenth-century Maratha warrior. Its underlying purpose was to recruit the figure of Shivaji for the construction of a collective identity for all lower castes. The ballad placed Shivaji within a startlingly new and overtly anti-Brahman interpretation of Maharashtra's history and culture. It represented the *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras* as the forgotten descendants of the heroic race of *Kshatriyas* of ancient India, led by the mythical Daitya King Bali. These had been subdued by Brahmans at the time of the Aryan invasions, and had remained subject to Brahman domination ever since. Phule supported this interpretation by deriving the term *Kshatriya* from the Marathi word *kshetra*, a field or place. The former term had originally denoted all those living peaceably together on the land before the arrival of the Brahman invaders. Phule used the ambiguities of Shivaji's own *varna* status to support his argument of the original *Kshatriya* identity of all *Shudras*, now concealed in the fictions of a Brahmanic religious hierarchy. He drew a parallel between Shivaji and the mythical King Bali as the leaders of the lower castes against external oppressors.

The collection of ballads entitled *Priestcraft Exposed* began with an account of the idyllic pre-Aryan realm of King Bali, and its invasion by Aryan Brahmans. It went on to describe how Brahman priests in nineteenth-century Maharashtrian society exploited its ignorant and illiterate peasant cultivators. *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department* was also a ballad. It depicted the dominance of Brahmans in the educational institutions of the British administration, their discouragement of the lower castes from educating themselves, and their hypocrisy in parading their social progressiveness before the British in order to win favours and employment while clinging in private to their idolatrous religious practices and their unregenerate caste pride. In

choosing the ballad or *pavada* verse form, Phule attempted to place his work within the mainstream of Maharashtra's rich oral tradition.

Slavery was a long prose work. It began with an introduction in English, describing the Aryan invasions and the subsequent history of Brahman oppression in India. It followed this with an appeal to the British government to check the power of Brahmans in the administration by popular education and the employment of non-Brahmans. The book continued with a Marathi introduction describing in detail the sufferings of the original *Kshatriyas* at the hands of the Brahman invaders, comparing the former to the negro slaves in America. The main text was cast as a dialogue between Phule himself and one 'Dhondiba', and was divided into sixteen parts.[5] In the first nine, Phule rewrote many of the central episodes of Hindu religious mythology – the incarnations of Vishnu; the story of King Bali and the dwarf, Vaman; the story of Parashuram's extirpation of the *Kshatriyas*. He argued that these represented the real history of ancient India, deliberately garbled by later Brahman writers in order to conceal their misdeeds and consolidate their power over the lower castes. He supported this by reinterpreting central elements in the social structure and popular culture of nineteenth-century Maharashtra, and arguing them to be survivals from this remote period. In the tenth and eleventh parts of the book, Phule turned to more recent events, in the revival of Brahmanic authority after its eclipse by Buddhism. He suggested that in India, as in every part of the world, popular heroes had always arisen to protect the weak from oppressive authority in the way that King Bali had tried to do, and gave Christ and the Buddha as examples. The last parts of the work were devoted to a minute analysis of the position which Phule argued Brahmans had built up for themselves under British rule, the power that this gave them over the masses of lower caste Hindus, and the way in which the British government had allowed real power to slip from its hands into those of the high caste administrative and professional elite which served it.

Ritual status and the reinterpretation of tradition

Phule thus waged his ideological battle on two fronts. He attacked what he thought to be the secular power of Brahmans as an administrative elite by urging the education and employment of the lower castes, and by seeking to inform the British government of what he felt to be the designs of its Brahman employees. He did not simply demand jobs for

5 This 'Dhondiba' was probably Dhondiram Namadev Kumbhar, a friend and admirer of Phule's, and later a member of the Satyashodhak Samaj and prolific writer.

the lower castes in the British administration. He argued for a radical restructuring of that administration itself, and for the transfer of greater power into the hands of sympathetic British administrators, so that the lower castes might be re-educated to a set of values more secular and egalitarian than those represented in Brahmanic religion. He regarded this as the prerequisite for all other forms of liberation for the lower castes.

This brings us to the second part of Phule's strategy: the provision of an ideological basis on which a potential popular following might be brought to reject the religious hierarchies of conventional Hindu society. He felt that these hierarchies derived their strength from their roots in the most important Hindu religious accounts of the origins of Indian society and its proper divisions, and in the prescriptions which this literature contained for the social life of the pious Hindu. In particular, he argued that the strongest hold of religious tradition on the people derived from the extensive integration of Hindu religious literature into the popular culture and oral traditions of Maharashtra. Phule's answer to this was to provide alternative accounts of the texts, myths, and stories most common in popular Hinduism. He linked these with important symbols and structures from contemporary Maharashtrian society in order to convey the real community of culture and interest that united all lower castes against their historical and cultural adversaries: the Brahmans. In his projection of this division, Phule drew skilfully on the traditions of martial heroism and identification with the land that were already prominent in popular culture. Chapter 2 outlined the tensions that existed between these local traditions and important sections of Brahman opinion in the Deccan. While the latter denied that any real *Kshatriyas* were left after the wars between Parashuram and the *Kshatriyas*, described in puranic literature, Maharashtra's history of military success had always encouraged claims to a *Kshatriya* status from groups with the power and resources to do so. At the same time, this local tradition, centred on the twin symbols of the warrior and the tiller of the soil, formed a focus for the expression of loyalty and identification, making a model for social aspiration, for much wider circles in rural society. Moreover, the very disputes between Brahmans and Marathas earlier in the century, together with the criteria for elite status then established, and the relaxation of caste discipline under British rule, had acted to intensify aspirations to a Maratha *Kshatriya* identity throughout the Maratha-*kunbi* complex of castes.

In arguing that all lower castes could rightfully call themselves *Kshatriya*, Phule was able to harness the impetus of an existing process of upward social mobility to a very unconventional and radical end: that

of suggesting a permanent and irreconcilable hostility between Brahmans and all other lower castes in society. The portrayal of this division was lent verisimilitude by representing the character of Parashuram, invoked by Brahmans themselves as the chief argument against Maratha claims of *Kshatriya* status, as the actual historical antagonist of the *Kshatriyas* of ancient India. The resulting ambiguity in non-Brahman ideology was thereafter a great source of strength to the non-Brahman movement, and a great weakness. It was a source of strength in that it allowed the retention of traditional loyalties and aspirations in a new radical guise. It was a weakness in that there was always the possibility of a slip back into a simple Sanskritising claim without any of the qualifying radicalism of Phule's own thought.

The idea of an original *Kshatriya* identity for the lower castes bears a very obvious similarity to the myths of a high status, now lost, that are a common feature of the culture of low and untouchable castes.[6] But Phule's was an origin myth with a difference. Rather than limiting himself to the history of a particular caste, his account projected a central historical and cultural tradition for Maharashtra itself. This tradition was shaped and given meaning by the struggles of Maharashtra's lower castes, her warriors and peasant cultivators. In creating this idea of a continuous and distinctive 'tradition', Phule also took into account the need for a reinterpretation of symbols. As we saw in chapter 2, some of the most important symbols in western Indian culture were the land and the peasant-cultivator, the warrior, and the figure of Shivaji himself. These symbols were, however, 'unassigned', in the sense that they were not the exclusive preserve of any particular caste group. Phule attempted to appropriate them definitively for the lower castes.

The implications of this ideological effort went far beyond the ritual status of the lower castes to impinge upon the concrete relations of power between these castes and other groups in society. Both to the lower castes, who represented Phule's hoped-for constituency, and to the British government, Phule projected Maharashtra's warriors and cultivators as the real substance of her society. To these, the true *Kshatriyas* of the nineteenth century, belonged the position of social power and political leadership that Brahmans had assumed under British rule. As the largest group in society, the providers of material support in times of peace and of protection in war, their support and advancement formed the first duty of the British government.

6 For examples of such origin myths see Owen Lynch, 'Dr B. R. Ambedkar – Myth and Charisma', in J. Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson 1972, pp. 97–112.

It is noteworthy that Phule did not attempt to recruit what might have been the most obvious symbol for a 'tradition' of Maharashtra – the title 'Maratha' itself. He feared that too much emphasis on a Maratha status might set up barriers between Maratha-*kunbis* and other lower castes. It might amount in real terms to little more than an assertion of the right to wear the sacred thread, and to have rituals and ceremonies conducted with Vedic texts, as befitted members of the *Kshatriya varna*. Phule preferred the idea of a community of *Shudras*, and employed the notion of an older *Kshatriya* status as a means of laying claim to social priority and political leadership.

From the 1880s, the polemicists of the developing non-Brahman movement at once reflected and transformed Phule's ideological concerns. The attempt to identify and appropriate a central 'tradition' of Maharashtra became one of their central ideological enterprises. The difference was that most of these non-Brahman polemicists attempted to appropriate the title of 'Maratha' itself, with all its attendant power, not yet exclusively assigned to any social group. They identified the term exclusively with the lower castes, and made it the very symbol of Maharashtra's 'tradition'. For all the contributions which other groups might have made to its history and culture, Maharashtra was, in the end, the Marathas. Like Phule's *Kshatriya* mythology, this attempt to identify the term 'Maratha' with the whole Maratha-*kunbi* complex and associated castes, and to exclude Brahmans, both reflected the growth of popular aspirations to an elite identity, and incorporated them in a programme for mass lower caste mobilisation. This resulted in the large-scale extension of the title 'Maratha', that formed so marked a feature of lower caste social structure from the end of the century.

This great ideological effort, originating with Phule, sparked off a debate within western Indian society that lasted well into the next century, and that dominated the exchanges between non-Brahmans and the early nationalists. Attempts to project and capture a 'tradition' of Maharashtra became the preoccupation of ideologues and polemicists from a whole variety of groups on either side. This debate was at its most obvious in the rival interpretations of the figure of Shivaji that gathered strength from the 1880s. The prizes in this ideological conflict were solid and real. It was by creating such 'traditions', and appropriating existing symbols to them, that politicians were able to gain access to mass popular loyalties, and to influence the social and economic policies of the British government. However, each group approached these issues with very different ideological resources with which to appropriate and reinterpret existing symbols, and each sought divergent and often conflicting policies from the government.

8
The Aryan invasions and the origins of caste society

Brahman myths and the discovery of low caste identity

Phule depicted Brahmans as the descendants of Aryan invaders, who had conquered the indigenous people of India. The Brahmans had usurped the inhabitants' rightful power and property, and had imposed their religion as an instrument of social control designed to perpetuate their rule. This formed the central polemical device in Phule's explanation of the sufferings of the lower castes. It was through this argument that he was able to deny the legitimacy of Brahmanic religious authority, to assert the hidden *Kshatriya* identity of all lower castes, and to reinterpret the most important stories, figures, and symbols in popular Hinduism from a new and radical perspective. In this interpretation of ancient Indian history, it is clear that he had drawn very heavily on the missionary accounts that were described in chapter 3, and in particular on the arguments of John Wilson's work *India Three Thousand Years Ago.*

Phule described how 'the Aryan progenitors of the present Brahman race' came originally from a region beyond the Indus, attracted by the proverbial wealth of India and the fertility of its land. They met with fierce resistance from the original inhabitants whom they subjugated, and traces of this ancient struggle were still to be seen in the terminology used to describe the lower castes in the present day. The term *Shudra* was popularly used to mean 'low' or 'insignificant' and to denote the lowest of the four *varnas*, while the term 'Mahar' probably derived from the phrase *maha-ari*, meaning 'the great enemy'.[1] Traces of this primeval conflict were also to be found in the religious writings of the Brahmans, in the accounts of the conflicts between the gods and their enemies, the Daityas, and the *raksas*, or demons, who tried to disrupt their worship. Those whom the Aryans had conquered had been known as *Kshatriyas*, because they had lived on and ruled over the land, or *kshetra*. Brahma and Parashuram were not gods, as their

1 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, D. Keer and S. G. Malshe (eds.), p. 72. While Phule drew heavily on missionary and Orientalist accounts of ancient India for his description of these struggles, and their survival in nineteenth-century culture, his derivation of the term 'Mahar' from *maha-ari*, 'great enemy', is his own.

present-day worship implied, but had been real historical figures, leaders in the Aryan onslaught. This had given rise to the story of Parashuram's attack on the *Kshatriyas* and his supposed extirpation of all true *Kshatriyas* from the earth.[2]

However, the Brahmans had been able to conceal this original act of usurpation, and to perpetuate their social privileges and religious authority. They were able to do this by their invention of the caste system, and the rights and duties that it assigned. Brahman writers gave these invidious social distinctions the force of religious law:

> In order to fulfil their plan that those people should remain perpetually in slavery, and that they should be able to live comfortably on what the Shudras earned by the sweat of their brow, the Brahmans set up the fiction of caste divisions, and made up several books on it for their own selfish ends.[3]

The institution of untouchability derived from the same conflict. The Mahars and Mangs of present-day society were only those whose ancestors had put up the fiercest resistance to the Brahman invaders. As a result, the Brahman rulers had singled them out for the special punishment of untouchability, and in the poverty caused by their exile from society they had taken to eating dead carcasses. The respectable non-Brahman castes responded to this exactly as the Brahmans wished:

> They did not realise that their ancestors were all of one house, and that the Brahmans had ruined the Mahars and Mangs in this way because they had fought against them with special force. Thus, the Brahmans caused these divisions to be set up, and taught the other castes to hate the Mahars and Mangs.[4]

In this linking of an idea of the ancient past with some of the central institutions and beliefs of present-day society, Phule injected his polemic with a great emotional power. For a potential low caste disciple, the discovery of his real identity, and of the hidden history of his ancestors, was intended to bring about an upheaval in his emotions as well as in his reasoned understanding of his social environment. In the ballad *Priestcraft Exposed*, Phule endowed the same story with an enormous emotional appeal:

> Lawless men leagued together
> They made Brahma their chief
> They plundered and caused chaos
>
> Beating the people and bringing them to their knees
> Degrading them into slaves
> See, these are the Shudras

2 Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 7–8.

3 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 91. 4 ibid.

The rest left over, a tiny number
Rose up and challenged Parashuram
They took care to remain united

Of their countrymen, their beloved brothers,
Many were slain
The Shudras no longer cared for unity

The maha-ari attacked Parashuram
Many women became widows
Parashuram routed the maha-ari

In constant fighting he broke their spirit
He did not spare pregnant women
He killed the newborn children

The great enemies of the twice-born
Came to the end of their strength
Thrust down and defeated

Those that were left were punished severely
Abused as Mangs and maha-aris, great enemies
See, these are the Kshatriyas of the olden days.[5]

The incarnations of Vishnu

In this way, many of the most important stories of popular Hindu mythology were but the distorted reflection of the ancient struggle between Brahmans and the *Kshatriyas* of pre-Aryan India. However, many of these stories lacked the sense of an historical progression that Phule was trying to convey. He therefore chose parts of them that already possessed an element of such linear ordering. He centred his analysis on the ten incarnations of the god Vishnu, representing these as the consecutive stages of the Aryan assault on the land of the ancient *Kshatriyas*. In the Hindu accounts, the first six incarnations of Vishnu are usually represented as: Matsya, the fish; Kurma, the tortoise; Varah, the boar; Narasinha, the man-lion; Vaman, the dwarf; and Parashuram, Rama with the axe. Phule wove these into his account of the invasion of the Aryans.[6] This account took up the first nine chapters of *Slavery*, written in the form of a dialogue between Phule and Dhondiram.

The Aryans had first made their attack in small boats that moved along through the water like fish, *masa* in Marathi. Hence, the nickname of their first leader came to be Matsya. These events were

5 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 46–7.
6 For information about these incarnations and the stories associated with them, see J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History and Literature*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1968.

preserved in the popular memory, in a form deliberately garbled by Brahman writers, in the story in the *Bhagavat purana*, of Vishnu having emerged from a fish.[7] The Aryan army mounted its next wave of attack in a larger boat. It was large and slow, resembling a tortoise in its movement. These were the real events behind the story of the second incarnation of Vishnu, given in the *Bhagavat purana*. Here, Vishnu appeared in the form of a tortoise or turtle to recover things of value lost in the deluge.[8]

In the story attached to the third incarnation, that of the boar Varah, a demon named Hiranyaksa had dragged the Earth to the bottom of the sea. Vishnu assumed the form of a boar to recover it, slaying the demon. The truth behind this myth lay in the unpleasant character of this particular leader of the Aryans:

> His nature and behaviour must have been loathsome, and wherever he went he must have won his battles by charging furiously like a wild boar. Therefore the Kshatriyas in the kingdoms of the brave Kings, the brothers Hiranyaksa and Hiranyakasipu called him a wild boar or pig in contempt, and as a result he must have been wild with anger; so he attacked their kingdoms continually, and inflicted much suffering on all the people living on the kshetras, and in the end, he slew Hiranyaksa in battle.[9]

Varah was followed as the leader of the Aryans by the fourth incarnation of Vishnu, Narasinha, the man-lion. In the popular religious stories concerning Narasinha, Visnu assumed this form to deliver the world from the tyranny of the Daitya or demon King Hiranyakasipu, the brother of Hiranyaksa. In Phule's account, Narasinha became the cunning and voracious leader of the Aryans, who coveted the kingdom of the *Kshatriya* Hiranyakasipu and slew him to gain it.[10]

Descended from Hiranyakasipu was the greatest leader of the ancient *Kshatriyas*, King Bali. He took steps to unite all the petty *Kshatriya* rulers of India in the effort to resist the Aryans. Vaman, the fifth incarnation of Vishnu, but in reality the new leader of the Aryans, advanced to the frontier of Bali's kingdom, and attacked his population of peaceful cultivators. After a great fight, Bali fell in battle, and his son Banasura was forced to flee. The popular memory of this great struggle found expression in the story of the *Bhagavat purana*, in which Vishnu assumed the form of Vaman, the dwarf, in order to subdue the overmighty Daitya King Bali. Vaman asked Bali, famed for his generosity, for three steps of the Earth. Bali granted this, whereupon Vishnu assumed the form of a giant and took three steps, over the

7 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 98–9.
8 ibid., p. 100. 9 ibid., p. 102. 10 ibid., pp. 102–3.

Earth, the sky, and finally on Bali's head, pushing him down into the nether regions.[11]

Phule then broke with the conventional Hindu accounts of the incarnations, and described the next leader of the Aryans as Brahma. The figure of Brahma had, of course, an absolutely central place in the most popular Hindu accounts of the origins of society, and of the most sacred Hindu religious texts. The four *varnas* were usually described as issuing from Brahma's body: the Brahman from his head, the *Kshatriya* from his arms, the *Vaishya* from his stomach, and the *Shudra*, the servant of the other classes, from his feet. This account reflected both the roles and the dignity of the four *varnas* in Hindu society. The Vedas, the oldest and most sacred of the Hindu writings, were conventionally described as having issued from Brahma's mouth. Access to the Vedas had always been one of the marks by which the twice-born castes were distinguished from those of the *Shudra varna*. It is likely, therefore, that Phule felt that the figure of Brahma had a special importance in the legitimation of conventional religious hierarchies, and represented an important target for reinterpretations. After Vaman died, the lack of a custom of appointing an elder leader among the Aryans gave Brahma his chance. Brahma is represented as the typical popular stereotype of a Brahman, an avaricious, cunning, and secretive clerk:

> There was a very skilful clerk by the name of Brahma, and he began to conduct all the affairs of state. He was extremely cunning, swam with the stream, and achieved his purposes in this way. No one put a scrap of faith in what he said, so the practice must have arisen of calling him the four-faced Brahma.[12]

Phule integrated the association of the Vedas with Brahma into his account:

> Brahma first invented the practice of scratching on palm leaves with a sharp point, and collected together some magical incantations and false fables that he knew off by heart. He made little poems out of them, like those of the Parsis, in the language that was current everywhere [of which the corruption is Sanskrit] and carefully wrote them out on palm-leaves. These then grew to be great popular favourites, and so thus the custom must have arisen of saying that all these stories, together with the knowledge of magical incantation, issued forth out of the mouth of Brahma.[13]

Brahma seized the opportunity created by the death of Banasura to invade his kingdom. In the struggles that followed, a very deep animosity grew up between the Brahmans and the ancient *Kshatriyas*

11 ibid., pp. 107–10.
12 ibid., p. 112. The figure of Brahma was often represented with four faces.
13 ibid. Here, Phule makes rather a crude pun on the Marathi phrase *sarvakrta*, meaning 'everywhere in use', and the word 'Sanskrit'.

that was still echoed in the divisions and exclusions of nineteenth-century society. The prohibition, in the writings of Manu, of the education of *Shudras* arose out of the Brahmans' fear 'lest the Shudras should remember their former greatness, and then rebel against their authority'.[14]

We have already seen the importance of the figure of Parashuram, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, for Phule's argument. The version of the myth that he gave exploited these themes in popular culture to the full. Parashuram succeeded Brahma as head of the Aryans, whereupon the *maha-ari*, the small groups of *Kshatriyas* left unconquered, 'attacked Parashuram twenty-one times to free their brothers from the hands of the Brahmans, and with such force that they became known as "dvaiti", and the corruption of that word has become "Daitya"'.[15] The Marathi term *dvaiti* means 'one who disagrees'. In this way, he gave a radical interpretation to the term 'Daitya', generally used in the basic myths of the Hindu tradition (as in the example of King Bali) to signify a race of demons who warred against the gods and interfered with sacrifices. Parashuram inflicted a terrible defeat on the *maha-ari*. Their banishment from society formed the orgins of the later institution of untouchability, and of the practice amongst untouchable castes of wearing a black thread around their necks:

> In order that they should never again lift up their hand against the Brahmans, he had a black thread tied around the neck of each of them as a sign, and prohibited even their Shudra brothers from touching them. He introduced the practice of calling these maha-ari Kshatriyas by the names of ati-Shudra, Mahar, antyaj, Mang and Chandal.[16]

Ritual knowledge and special power

Phule also placed, in the context of his historical account, the learning and knowledge of ritual and the sacred books of Hinduism that formed the proper accomplishment of a Brahman priest. Phule was completely clear about the way in which this monopoly of ritual knowledge operated to maintain the religious authority of the priesthood. It helped to keep the priesthood distinct from a laity that lacked any knowledge even of the language in which it was couched, let alone of its prescriptions for ritual and action; but one which nevertheless believed in their importance and efficacy.[17] Phule's strategy here forms an

14 ibid., p. 114. 15 ibid., pp. 115–16. 16 ibid., p. 116.

17 Phule's analysis here bears some resemblance to Max Weber's later description of the basis of Brahmanic priestly power in 'knowledge'. Weber described how the possession of this knowledge shaped the human possibility for good and evil, so that all evil could be ascribed to the lack of it in ignorance. Brahmans were 'a status group

interesting contrast to the missionary attempts to undermine Brahmanic religious authority. They had made freely available many of the most important Sanskrit texts that had previously been the exclusive property of Brahmans. Phule's tactic was different. He set the special knowledge of Brahman priests, and the distinctive marks of Brahmanhood in general, in the same historical context as the religious myths. When Brahma invaded Bali's kingdom, he issued a white thread to each of his men for the purpose of mutual recognition in case of difficulty, 'which nowadays they call the sacred thread of the Brahmans'.[18] In addition to this: 'He taught to everyone a basic incantation that expressed his position, which nowadays they call the "gayatri mantra", and impressed strictly upon them that whatever happened, they were not to reveal this to the Kshatriyas.' The Brahman warriors also wrote these magical formulae on their weapons before going into battle. After the defeat of the *Kshatriyas*, therefore: 'It was natural that the dread of Brahman knowledge should remain in the minds of all the credulous Kshatriyas.'[19] This ancient struggle had set the pattern for the contemporary control by Brahmans of the knowledge of ritual which occupied such an important place in the lives of the lower castes: 'From all this, the bhat Brahmans cheat and deceive the ignorant Malis and kunbis with their rituals, repetitions of the name of god and their knowledge of magical formulae even in these enlightened times.'[20]

Phule also used the dating of different texts to point out the real status of the writings upon which the special power of the priest depended. Here again, it is clear that he has drawn on the arguments of missionary propaganda, hoping to affect a potential audience, in much the same way as Baba Padmanji found his belief in the divine origins of the Vedas, and in the power of the priest that repeated them, undermined when he read that the Vedas could be dated in human terms.[21] Phule asked why it was that if the four Vedas issued from the mouth of Brahma, the later interpolations of the *rshis*, ancient Hindu sages, could be found in them. He also explained that internal evidence

of genteel literati whose magical charisma rests on "knowledge". Such knowledge was magical and ritualistic in character, deposited in a holy literature, written in a holy language remote from that of everyday speech.' Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, The Free Press, New York 1958, p. 139.

18 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 113.

19 ibid., p. 119. The *gayatri mantra* was one of the most sacred verses of the Vedas used in prayer. According to Jadunath Sarkar this was the verse that was deliberately withheld by the Brahmans at the coronation of Shivaji Bhosale, since it represented the last bastion of Brahman exclusiveness: Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times*, Orient Longman, Bombay 1973, p. 206. It was probably this significance of the *gayatri mantra* that Phule was trying to reflect here.

20 ibid., p. 120.

21 See p. 115.

within the writings of Manu made it certain that it had been written well after the *Bhagavat purana*, contrary to the former's reputation for a greater antiquity.[22]

Here, then, Phule presented an explanation of Brahman learning, its exclusiveness and portentious secrecy, that could be taken up by any low caste Hindu who was determined to deny that such enormous religious power could rest exclusively in the hands of one group. Phule concluded his account in *Slavery* by describing the subsequent diffusion of Brahmanic myth and ritual amongst the *Kshatriyas* of ancient Hindu society, and their decline from pre-eminence as warriors and rulers, to their lowly status as *Shudras* in the nineteenth century.

The Aryan past and the idea of a golden age

Phule's interpretation of this Aryan past differed strikingly from the meanings that were ascribed to it in most other contemporary accounts. The term 'Arya' had, of course, quite a wide range of associations, and these were to change during the nineteenth century. In general Marathi usage, it carried the idea of a respectable or noble descent.[23] It was also linked with the geographical concept of Aryavarta, the old cradle of European civilisation in north-west India. Orientalists and philologists earlier in the nineteenth century had developed the argument that all speakers of Indo-European languages had shared a common origin in Aryavarta, and had gone their separate ways, to India, Persia, and Europe, after 2,000 BC. In the *Rgveda* of the Hindus, and the *Avesta* of the Persians, this people had called itself 'Arya', or 'noble'. This suggestion of a common parentage was developed at length in the mid-nineteenth century in the work of Friedrich Max Müller, who used the idea to extol the virtues of ancient Indian society. Max Müller's ideas rapidly achieved circulation amongst western-educated Indian intellectuals.[24]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, the term 'Arya' had come to connote a golden age of Indo-European civilisation. By extension, it referred also to all that was 'best' in the Hindu tradition itself: it represented justice, virtue, and learning, the values of a highly developed civilisation. The implication here was that, for the Hindus, this golden age had been followed by a 'fall', and a decline into the

22 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 120–1.
23 See Molesworth's *Marathi–English Dictionary*, p. 74.
24 I am indebted for much of my information in this section to Joan Leopold, 'The Aryan Theory of Race', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, June 1970, pp. 271–97.

corruption of the present. The explanation for this decline was often found in the dilution of 'pure' Aryan culture as the Aryans intermingled with the less civilized Dravidians and hill tribes of the Indian peninsular. This contrast of 'Aryan' with 'Dravidian' implicitly associated the former with higher caste Hindus. Their virtues, in their pure and ancient form, represented all that was most valuable in the Hindu tradition. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, for example, emphasised the superiority of Asiatic Aryan culture. He regarded the conquest, and assimilation of non-Aryans, as a sign not of tyranny and injustice, but of the strength and vitality of the Aryan races.[25] Mahadev Govind Ranade presented the religious ideas of the Aryans as a basis for national political unity. He described how the original customs of the Aryans had been corrupted by the influence of the more primitive peoples of the south of India, who had been responsible for the introduction of customs that degraded women – *sati*, polygamy, and polyandry – and communal land tenure.[26] Dayananda Sarasvati and Aurobindo Ghose denied that there had been a struggle between the Aryans and the Dravidians that had given rise to the *varna* system. The *Shudras* of the present day were merely the descendants of ignorant Aryans who should be absorbed back into the Aryan fold. Dayananda Sarasvati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, constructed in his work *Satyartha Prakash* a complex theory of the ancient Aryan past. Aryan dynasties had then spread education and the Vedic religion to most of the western world.[27]

In this way, the term 'Aryan' came to define all that was most worth preserving in the Hindu tradition. At the same time it carried a clear implication, if not of the social groups that did represent Aryan values, at least of those that definitely did not – the *Shudras* of nineteenth-century India. Phule turned this interpretation of the Aryan past upside-down. The 'golden age' of India had been the pre-Aryan realm of *Kshatriyas*, under the benign rule of King Bali. The most important values of this society were those of the warrior and the peaceful landholder and cultivator. These values represented all that was best in nineteenth-century society. Their representatives were the *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras*, who united in their history the martial and the agricultural pursuits.

It is also noteworthy that of all the writers who were to draw upon the

25 Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *The Arctic Home of the Vedas*, Pune 1903, quoted in J. Leopold, 'The Aryan Theory of Race', p. 275.

26 M. G. Ranade, in M. B. Kolasker (ed.), *Religious and Social Reform*, quoted in J. Leopold, 'The Aryan Theory of Race', pp. 279–81.

27 For an account of Dayananda Sarasvati's *Satyartha Prakash*, see J. T. F. Jordens, *Dyananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1978, pp. 99–126.

work of Orientalists and Sanskritists such as Max Müller to develop the concept of an ancient Aryan past, Phule was very much the earliest. Ghose, Tilak, and Ranade were all writing at the very end of the century. Dayananda's *Satyartha Prakash* came out two years after Phule's *Slavery*, in 1875. Phule was always very much to the forefront in recognising the potential ideological importance of key symbols and concepts in nineteenth-century society, and in attempting to give them a meaning in line with his broader interpretation of history. In the case of the term 'Arya', he was less successful than he was, for example, with the term '*Kshatriya*'. The term retained its elite connotations for many members of the non-Brahman movement. Phule himself was later to produce a reinterpretation of the term to accommodate this.

Phule's focus of protest upon the idea of the indigenous ownership of the land has important parallels in other societies and movements. The example that springs most readily to mind is the idea of the Norman Yoke in English history. Christopher Hill has delineated the outlines of this theory as it was presented in the work of popular historians and radical pamphleteers from the early seventeenth century.[28] Before the Norman invasion of 1066, the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of England had lived as equal citizens, owning their own land and governing themselves through representative institutions. The Norman Conquest deprived them of their political freedom, and of their rights over the land, in establishing the tyranny of an alien king and landlords. This act of usurpation did not wipe out the popular memories of liberties previously enjoyed, and since 1066 the people had fought continuously to regain them from the descendants of the Normans.[29] This idea served in a variety of roles as a prominent element of popular political radicalism in England from the seventeenth century. As an explanation, powerful in its simplicity, of many of the political conflicts in England's history, it served both Parliamentarian pamphleteers and extreme radical groups in the English Civil War, and radicals and reformers of the eighteenth century such as Major Cartwright and Thomas Paine. It was used in the nineteenth century to attack the landed aristocracy and the concentration of political power within the narrow circles of the wealthy and privileged, in the writings of William Cobbett and even of some Chartists. In very widely varying contents, therefore, the theory could be used to suggest an irreconcilable opposition between the interests of

28 For more detail see the very interesting chapter on the Norman Yoke in Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, Mercury Books, London 1962, pp. 50–122. I am also indebted here to a very useful discussion with Dr Francis Robinson.

29 Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, p. 57.

the working population, the majority of the people of England, and those of the Crown and the landed classes.

Victor Turner has described a similar phenomenon in his analysis of movements of protest among low status groups in African societies. Where there is a belief that in ancient times the indigenous inhabitants of the land have been conquered, protest among groups at the lower levels of society tends to focus on this supposed act of usurpation. Such groups see themselves as searching for a wholeness that has been lost, a wholeness represented by the land itself in its ancient unconquered state, and by the undivided human community that occupied it. This geographical and social wholeness is contrasted with the hierarchies that were introduced in the 'fall', represented by conquest from without. Turner describes how

> these autochthonous people have religious power, the 'power of the weak' as against the jural–political power of the strong, and represent the undivided land itself as against the political system with its internal segmentation and hierarchies of authority. Here the model of an undifferentiated whole, whose units are total human beings, is posited against that of a differentiated system, whose units are status and roles, and where the social persona is segmentalised into positions in a structure.[30]

The ability to explain inequalities by referring to an ancient act of expropriation of the land has clearly played a pivotal role in the process of group identity formation in a very wide variety of historical and cultural settings. Taken as history, such a theory enables large numbers of people to lay claim to their own understanding of the past. In societies where detailed information about the past has been the preserve of literary or religious specialists, this opens up new possibilities for the mobilisation of large popular groups. Certainly, the conviction that the Maratha-*kunbis* were the original inhabitants of western India was to be a crucial element in the longer-term emergence of a distinctive 'Maratha' identity, with its accompanying demands for the redress of economic religious and educational inequalities.

30 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1974, p. 234.

9

Warriors and cultivators: the reinterpretation of popular culture

Introduction

Phule endowed his ideas about the ancient past with immediate significance by integrating into his account a wealth of practices, beliefs, and symbols from contemporary popular culture and religion. In this way, he hoped to make it possible for potential followers to 'discover' a common identity for all lower castes. This identity existed in the midst of familiar institutions and traditions. Its true significance had always been concealed by the mystifications of Brahmanic religion.

The figures which feature most prominently in Phule's account are the god Khandoba, and the good Daitya King Bali of Hindu mythology.[1] In Khandoba, Phule chose one of the central figures of popular religious culture in Maharashtra, the god who was the *kuladevata* or guardian deity of the Maratha and *kunbi* group of castes. His chief shrine was (and still is) at Jejuri. He is pictured here as a *linga*, although as the guardian deity of the Deccan he is more often portrayed as a horseman with a sword in his right hand. He was also worshipped under different names according to his various aspects. The gods Mhasoba, Bahiroba, and Martand were all different names of Khandoba. Likewise they were central figures in the religious and agricultural year of western Maharashtra's largest group of cultivating and peasant castes. Originally, Khandoba was probably a local deity, and has been Sanskritised as an incarnation of Shiva.[2] In a sense, Phule was trying to reverse this process of the Sanskritisation of local deities, and to detach this local religious tradition from its association with the all-India traditions of Hinduism.

The convert Krshnarao Ratnaji Sangle has left a very valuable account from the 1860s of the worship of Khandoba in his family. His family were of the Sali or weaver caste, a caste roughly equivalent in ritual status to respectable Malis and *kunbis*.[3] Sangle prefaced his

1 See pp. 136–7.
2 For an account of the god Khandoba, see R. C. Dhere, *Khandoba*, Pune 1961 (Marathi); and Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer, *Biroba, Mhaskoba und Khandoba: Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von Pastoralen Gottheiten in Maharashtra*, Wiesbaden 1976 (German, with English synopsis), pp. 180–98.
3 For previous references to Krshnarao Ratnaji Sangle, see pp. 116–17.

account by describing how the gods that Hindus worshipped were determined by their castes. The Brahman castes centred their worship on the ritual of the sacred thread, and paid little attention to ghosts and evil spirits. Marathas and other cultivators made Khandoba the main object of their worship. The untouchable castes of Mahars and Mangs worshipped ghosts or spirits, such as Mariai, Janai, and Jokai.[4]

Sangle described how:

Every Sunday, we always used to perform the ritual of presenting offerings to Khandoba. A dish filled with betel leaves, coconut and turmeric was lifted up in offering with the burning of incense, and we all shouted 'Victory to Khandoba' three times. Then everyone put turmeric on their forehead, distributed the leaves and coconut, and then taking lights and vessels of oil we stood outside in the courtyard and scattered the turmeric towards the sky, made a salutation, and shouted greetings such as 'Har, Har Mahadev', 'Prosperity to Chintaman More', 'Victory [the Marathi is *Chang bhala*] to Bahiroba', 'Hail to Malukhan', and so on.[5]

We have already seen how Phule interpreted the other figure with which we are concerned here, the good King Bali. The figure of Bali was strongly identified in nineteenth-century popular culture with the tillers of the soil. In his classic examination of the sociology and culture of the village, made in 1915, T. N. Atre discussed the figure of Bali, bringing out the potent symbolism in Maharashtrian culture of the life of the village, the tilling of the soil, and the figure of the cultivator himself, the labourer and provider. In a predominantly rural society, these images would clearly evoke a strong sense of identification and loyalty:

It is the kunbis who have taken up the burden of providing for the support and nourishment of the world, and so people call the kunbis 'King Bali'. The puranic story of how King Bali gave the world away to Vaman is very well known. There is no occupation like that of tilling the soil for building up the strength [the Marathi word is *bala*] of the body, and all other castes agree that no caste is as strong as the kunbis. Therefore, perhaps as the Brahmans are called 'pandit' so the kunbis are called 'Bali', meaning 'possessed of strength'.[6]

Beside its significance in Atre's account, the figure of Bali was also associated in popular culture with a 'golden age', a happier state of society now vanished. This was expressed in the very common Marathi proverb, 'May all sorrows and troubles disappear, and the kingdom of Bali come.'[7]

4 Krshnarao Ratnaji Sangle, MS autobiography, chapter entitled 'Our religion is Hindu – but should we call it Hindu, or pure Arya?' 5 ibid.
6 T. N. Atre, *Gavagada*, Bombay 1915, p. 5.
7 Rev. A. Manwaring, *Marathi Proverbs*, Oxford 1899, p. 137.

Phule's choice of the figures of Khandoba and Bali was therefore a very careful one. Organising his account of the 'hidden history' of the lower castes around them, he was given immediate access to a whole range of already existing identities and loyalties.

The community of *Kshatriyas* and the pre-Aryan state

Phule's collection of *pavadas* entitled *Priestcraft Exposed* described 'who ruled and how in this blessed land of Hindusthan before the Brahman conquest'. In them, he presented a picture of happy communities of *Kshatriyas*. These were governed by their leader, King Bali, and by officials that were known as 'Khandobas', among whom were Bahiroba, Mhasoba, and Martand.[8]

> A power with nine provinces [*khanda*] was united together
> Kashi was the tenth
> The many took care to preserve their unity
>
> Serious and virtuous, brave in battle
> To each province [*khanda*] one was appointed to rule
> He was called a 'Khandoba'
>
> Great heroes; Martand their chief
> The black Bahiri was also made a leader
> He treated the other nine Khandobas well
>
> The country was great; mighty officials [*subhas*] were appointed
> They carried out the business of their masters
> All who saw the country were struck with admiration
>
> The chief official [*maha subha*, rendered as 'Mhasoba'] supporting them
> No less clever and strong
> Another like the black Bahiri
>
> Enquiries about justice were given to the wise
> They appointed many to help
> The chief justices of the nine districts [*navakhandacha nyaya*, rendered as 'Navakhanachi Janai']
>
> Many footsoldiers, strong horses,
> The archers no less skilled
> The spears bound to their shoulders
>
> They fought both with diplomacy and with arrows
> The wrestlers went into battle
> The many took care to preserve their unity

8 Where the Marathi word is necessary for the reader to make sense of Phule's play on words, I have given this in brackets. Where Phule himself has turned one Marathi phrase into another, I have given both in brackets.

If small princes fell into difficulty
They would come running to their help
They took the seven into shelter [*sata Ashrayit* rendered as 'Sati Asara']

Rainwater was plentiful
Power was exerted gently
The happiness of heaven pales beside.[9]

Phule here encompassed a whole range of figures, symbols, and beliefs from popular religious culture. These were village gods and goddesses that would have been a central part of the religious life of the village cultivator. Bahiri is a familiar appellation of the god Bahiroba. The 'black Bahiri' is the presiding deity of Kashi or Banaras.[10] This gives Phule the link for the reference in the second line. He also includes figures that Sangle described as specifically Mang and Mahar deities, such as the Janai of the sixth verse.[11] Why she should be 'of nine khan' (*navakhanachi*) is not clear. This may have some reference to the practice of presenting a goddess with a blouse-piece, or *khan*, during worship. The 'sati asara' of the ninth verse were popularly believed to be the ghosts of young women who commit suicide by drowning themselves after giving birth. They would have been feared and propitiated in village culture in the same way as other ghosts and evil spirits.[12]

Phule continued his description in his work *Slavery*. King Bali was the greatest ruler of the old communities of *Kshatriyas*. To each of these he appointed a lieutenant, a 'Khandoba'. Phule linked his description of the Khabdobas directly with contemporary religious practices. The great popularity of the ruler Mhasoba in the pre-Aryan communities was still reflected in the habits of the Marathas in the nineteenth century:

You will not find one family among the Marathas who do not set up in the grounds around their village some stone or other in the name of Mhasoba, smear it with red lead, and offer incense to it; who, without taking Mhasoba's

9 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, D. Keer and S. G. Malshe (eds.), pp. 45–6. The introduction to this work is signed 'B. P.' It is very probable that this was the Christian convert Baba Padmanji. He said in the introduction that many people might feel that the cunning and deceptions of Brahman priests was common knowledge among all educated and enlightened people, so that they might ask whether such a work as *Priestcraft Exposed* had any point. However, he explained: 'The Brahmans still work their wiles amongst the kunbis, Malis and other Shudra people, and this to an extent that the enlightened people of today do not realise.' Introduction signed 'B. P.' to Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, p. 43.

10 Molesworth's *Marathi–English Dictionary*, p. 163.

11 The Pune volume of the *Bombay Gazetteer* described Janai as a local goddess. *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 553.

12 *Maharashtra Shabda Kosha*, vol. 1, Pune 1932, p. 295.

name will not put his hand to the seed-box of the plough, will not put the harrow to the field, and will not put the measure to the heap of threshed corn on the threshing floor.[13]

Bali's kingdom stretched as far as Kashi. Here again, Phule used a pun on words to make a connection between his account and elements in nineteenth-century religion: 'There were some lands under Bali's rule near Ayodhya, which were called the tenth province. There, the chief official at one time was called the "black Bahiri".' The same official was the chief officer of the police of the town (*kotaval*).[14] The 'black Bahiri' of Kashi was also known as the 'Kotaval' of the town.[15] Bali also held sway over many lesser rulers. Here, Phule explained his earlier reference to the 'seven given shelter', which he had in turn derived from the 'sati asara', the spirits of drowned women: 'Seven of the Kshetrapatis made over the management of their affairs to King Bali and made use of his support. Therefore, we find that their names came to be "the seven given shelter".' They were given this name to reproach them for their 'womanly' lack of courage.[16] Concern for the welfare of the tillers of the soil had been the main priority of the rulers of the pre-Aryan state: 'Out of all the great heroes under Bali, Bahiroba, Jotiba and the nine Khandobas were unsurpassed in their striving for the happiness of the cultivators.'[17]

The reinterpretation of popular culture

With great ingenuity, Phule traced many more general practices and beliefs current in nineteenth-century Maharashtra to this idyllic pre-Aryan society. The practice of presenting a *tali* or dish of offerings to Khandoba, which we have seen Sangle describe, originated under King Bali's rule:

When King Bali had some work of importance to devolve upon his sardars, he would hold a session of his court, and spread out some turmeric powder, coconut and a roll of betel leaves on a platter, and say 'Whoever has the courage to take up this work should pick up this roll of betel leaves.' So the man who had the courage to see the task through would take the oath 'Har, Har Mahavir', apply the turmeric to his forehead, pick up the coconut and the roll of betel leaves and raise it over his head, thus signifying his acceptance of the

13 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 106. The word 'Maratha' is here spelt 'Marhathe'. The god Mhasoba is still represented as a stone covered in red lead, and can be seen outside the walls of most Maharashtrian villages.

14 ibid., p. 106.

15 Molesworth's *Marathi–English Dictionary*, pp. 162 and 163.

16 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 106, and ibid., p. 116, for the reference to their 'womanly' lack of courage.

17 ibid., p. 107.

task. Bali would give the work to this man. Then this warrior would take Bali's orders, break up camp and move in upon the enemy. From this, the name of the rite came to be *tal ucalane*. The corruption of this is *tali ucalane*.[18]

In this passage, Phule constructed a complex network of meaning. The term for a roll of betel leaves is *vida*; the term *vida ucalane* denotes the acceptance of a challenge. Molesworth tells us: 'The expression originates in a custom of throwing a *wira* (*vida*) into the midst of an assembly (as of warriors, statesmen, etc.) in indication of defiance or invitation to some arduous work.'[19] The term *tal ucalane* means 'to break camp', while *tali ucalane*, 'picking up the tali' refers to the practices concerned with the worship of Khandoba that we saw outlined in Sangle's account. The reverence in which the old leaders were held, Phule argued, had resulted in their now being regarded as deities among the Marathas:

Before the commencement of any auspicious work, no Maratha will fail to perform the rite of picking up the tali. In this rite, they regard Bahiroba, Jotiba and Khandoba as deities, and take their names as they lift up the tali as follows: 'Har, Har Mahadev. Chang bhala to Bahiroba and Jotiba.'[20]

The custom of Sunday worship amongst the cultivating castes had likewise derived from this early period:

King Bali and all his subjects used to regard Sunday as a holy day, and took the names of the great gods on that day. Therefore, among the Marathas of today, the Mangs, Mahars, kunbis and Malis, the people will not touch even a drop of water before they have poured water on the image of the gods and made them an offering of food on this day of the week.[21]

Likewise the defeat of King Bali by Vaman was kept alive in folk memory and reflected in the rituals of Marathas on the day of Dasara, the tenth day of the month of Ashvin.[22] After the defeat of King Bali:

18 ibid., pp. 106–107.
19 Molesworth's *Marathi–English Dictionary*, p. 757.
20 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 107. The cry of 'Har, Har Mahadev' or 'Mahavir' forms the Maratha battle-cry, invoking the god Shiva as 'Hari' and 'Mahadeva'.
21 ibid. This is consistent with Krshnarao Ratnaji Sangle's account of his family's Sunday worship.
22 The Hindu Dasara festival lasts for the first ten days of the light half of the month of Ashvin. This central festival of all-India Hinduism celebrates the victories of Rama, whose exploits are represented in the work *Rama Lila*, a dramatisation of the principal incidents of the *Ramayana*, designed, as A. C. Mukherji tells us, 'to instruct ignorant audiences in the moral teachings of the great Hindu epic'. A. C. Mukherji, *Hindu Fasts and Feasts*, Allahabad 1916, p. 118. For an account of the complexities of the Hindu calendar, see A. K. Charkravarty, *The Origin and Development of Indian Calendrical Science*, Calcutta 1975, and Ruth S. and Stanley A. Freed, 'Calendars Ceremonies and Festivals in a North Indian Village: The Necessary Calendric Information for Fieldwork', *South-western Journal of Anthropology*, 20, 1964, pp. 67–90.

On the tenth day of Ashvin in the evening, Banasura's people each went to their own homes, where their wives, knowing the prophecy that a second Bali would come and establish the kingdom of God upon earth, stood at the threshold of the house, waved lamps around them and said, 'May all sorrows – the power of the twice-born – disappear and the Kingdom of Bali come.' From that day until now, thousands of years have passed by, but still the women of the descendants of the Kshatriyas of Bali's kingdom, on the tenth day of Ashvin wave lamps around their husbands and sons, still not giving up the hope that Bali's kingdom may come.[23]

Here again, Phule took a series of contemporary customs and gave them a new meaning. B. A. Gupte described how at the festival of Divali in Maharashtra, women prepare images of King Bali, worship them, and repeat the blessing 'May all evils disappear and Raja Bali's empire be restored.'[24] P. V. Kane described how Bali was worshipped on the first day of the month of Kartika, when people set up his image inside their houses and worshipped it with fruit and flowers.[25] A. Manwaring, the collector of Marathi proverbs, referred to the verse concerning Bali and explained: 'The Shudras are fond of King Bali because he took their part against Vaman and the Brahmans. The phrase is still used at the Dasara festival.'[26]

The Maratha practice of the celebration of dead warrior heroes referred to a much older episode, when: 'On the first day of the month of Phalgun, each of Banasura's Kshatriya subjects took a naked sword in their hands, and became warriors in the name of their relatives fallen in battle, and honoured them by dancing very joyfully.'[27] This refers to the practice described by B. A. Gupte that took place on the full-moon day of the month of Phalgun. On this occasion: 'Among the Marathas proper, the *Vir*, or people who died on the battlefield, are "danced" by their descendants, who go around the fire with a drawn sword until they get into a trance, or believe themselves possessed by the spirits of the hero.'[28] The Pune edition of the *Bombay Gazetteer* linked this practice

23 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 108.

24 B. A. Gupte, *Hindu Holidays and Ceremonials, with Dissertations on Origins, Folklore and Symbols*, Calcutta 1919, p. 36.

25 P. V. Kane, *A History of Dharmasastra*, vol. 5, pt. 1, Pune 1958–75, pp. 201–2.

26 Rev. A. Manwaring, *Marathi Proverbs*, p. 118. M. M. Underhill discusses the popular festivals concerned with Bali. In these, some groups celebrate his defeat and light lamps to avoid falling under his power after Vaman has trodden him down into the nether regions. Others pray for the restoration of his kingdom. He suggests that the wish for Bali's kingdom to 'return' is most common among the *Shudras*: 'Whose champion, Bali, was against the overbearing higher castes. If this is correct, we have the interesting sight of a festival kept by the descendants of two parties to a long-ago struggle, both camps celebrating both protagonists on successive days.' M. M. Underhill, *The Hindu Religious Year*, Calcutta 1921, p. 64.

27 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 109.

28 B. A. Gupte, *Hindu Holidays*, p. 87.

to the start of the agricultural year, when offerings were made up to three generations of dead warriors.[29]

Phule extended his interpretation to another crucial set of reference points for the structure of popular religious consciousness – the religious calendar. In the organisation of time itself lay a potent source for the ascription of a religious meaning to everyday activities. Moreover, it was often through the religious festivals and observances of the 'great tradition' of Hinduism, celebrated throughout India and drawn from the events of classical Hindu mythology, that the lower castes at the local level were integrated into the beliefs and practices of all-India Hinduism. Their religious loyalties might otherwise remain attached to local figures and cults. Phule took the central festivals of the all-India religious year – mainly in the months of Ashvin and Kartika – and organised around them the battle between Bali and Vaman, the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu. The ceremony of *shraddha* was performed in the dark half of the month of Bhadarapad to the manes of male ancestors. This recalled the fighting between the forces of Bali and Vaman during this part of the month.[30] Phule conflated the *sati* of Bali's wife, Vindhyavali, on the eighth day of the Navaratra or Dasara festival with the Durga *puja*. This is celebrated on the eighth day of the ten days of the festival. The Durga *puja* is very much a women's festival. During it bands of women go daily to worship at a Durga temple. Phule may here have been aiming at female religious consciousness.[31] The Durga *puja* had really originated with the *sati* of Vindhyavali, on her hearing of the death of Bali in battle.[32]

Phule included in his account the important tenth day of the Navaratra, the 'Vijayadashami' or 'glorious tenth'. On this occasion, the men of the village cross over the village boundary and take some leaves from the *shami* tree; these leaves represent 'gold' on this day. They are 'looted' by the men and brought back in triumph to the village. This day was also considered the most auspicious time among Maratha chiefs for starting a campaign.[33] These rites represented the garbled folk memory of Vaman's attack and looting of the dead Bali's capital city.[34] Next, Phule incorporated the beliefs and practices of the Kojagari *purnima*,

29 *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. XVIII, no. 1, Poona 1885, p. 295.

30 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 107. For an account of the *shraddha* ceremony in the month of Bhadarapad, see M. M. Underhill, *The Hindu Religious Year*, pp. 112–18.

31 For an account of the Durga *puja*, see A. C. Mukherji, *Hindu Fasts and Feasts*, p. 120, and M. M. Underhill, *The Hindu Religious Year*, p. 55.

32 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 107..

33 For a description of the ceremonies of Vijayadashami, see B. A. Gupte, *Hindu Holidays*, pp. 180–3, and M. M. Underhill, *The Hindu Religious Year*, pp. 56–7.

34 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 108.

the full-moon day of Ashvin following the Durga *puja*. On this occasion, the goddess Lakshmi is believed to make a circuit of the earth and to bestow her favours on anyone she finds awake. Coconut milk should be drunk at midnight, and a light shown outside the house to make the goddess pause and give her blessing. Offerings of fruit, flowers, and sweets are made to her.[35] These rites recalled the vigil spent by Vaman and his forces making offerings before his god and praying for victory over Banasura and his forces.[36]

Phule completed his account with a reinterpretation of the Divali festival. This takes place between the thirteenth day of the dark half of Ashvin to the second day of the light half of Kartika. Divali centres on the worship of the goddess Lakshmi and each house is illuminated to attract her wealth. It is a festival of feasting and rejoicing, and culminates in the rite of *bhaubij*. Here, every man must dine at his sister's house. This celebrates the dining of Yama, the god of death, with his sister. Small lamps are waved around the heads of the men. As we have seen, Bali himself is worshipped during Divali, on the day immediately before *bhaubij*, the first day of the light half of Kartik. Phule drew all these elements together into his account. These popular rites recalled the great rejoicing together of the *Kshatriyas* at the defeat of Vaman. The women feasted their brothers in celebration, and 'waved lamps around their heads and reminded them of the Bali who would come again, saying "May all sorrows and troubles disappear and Bali's kingdom come."'[37]

Phule therefore constructed with great ingenuity a complete rival interpretation of the conventional Hindu religious year. Its adoption by a potential follower would not have entailed any sense of the dislocation that would have accompanied the complete destruction of traditional categories of thought and practice. Conventional practices could be maintained, but invested with a new significance.

The reinterpretation of social categories

The other contemporary social categories that Phule incorporated into his scheme were the *varna* categories of *Kshatriya* and *Shudra-ati-Shudra*, and the term 'Maratha'. The argument that the *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras* of the present day were the displaced and deprived descendants of the *Kshatriyas* of pre-Aryan India was the cornerstone of

35 For an account of the rites and beliefs of the Kojagari Lakshmi *puja*, see A. C. Mukherji, *Hindu Fasts and Feasts*, pp. 126–31.
36 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 109.
37 ibid., p. 110.

Phule's attempt to construct a new identity for the lower castes. With this argument, Phule invoked and appealed explicitly to existing loyalties and social aspirations. In his *Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, Shivaji is described as 'the child of the great warrior Kshatriya'.[38] The ballad is intended for 'the ruined Kshatriyas, kunbis, Malis, Mahars, and Mangs'.[39] Phule makes Shivaji into the archetypal leader of the erstwhile *Kshatriyas*, the lower castes, and implicitly conflates him with King Bali. Shivaji's mother tells him of the life of his ancestors:

> The home of the Kshatriyas was on the land [rendered as *kshetra*]
> Your forefathers were great heroes
> There was no limit to their happiness
> In every way it was their mother country.[40]

Phule makes the connection between the two *varna* categories, again obliquely, by the use of a pun: 'Jotirao Phule sings of the son of the Kshudras, the chief master of the peshwas.'[41] Here, the word *kshudra* both recalls the term *Kshatriya* and points to the origin of the term *Shudra*. Phule located its origin in the Marathi word *kshudra*, meaning 'base'. Shivaji is described as 'the first King among the kshetriyas', meaning 'the Shudras of the south'.[42] In the final verse of the ballad, he makes a startlingly direct connection between this perception of ancient history and the access to forms of western education and scholarly research into the past that made such a perception possible: 'English learning came, so I call myself the son of the land [rendered as *kshetra*]; this puts an end to the tricks of the Brahmans.'[43] In the introduction to the work *Slavery*, he emphasised the 'cruelties and atrocities which Parashuram committed on the Kshetriyas, the people of this land'.[44] After Parashuram's victory, the Brahman writers composed the bulk of what were now regarded as the sacred writings of the Hindus, the 'smrtis, sanhitas, shastras, and puranas'. In these, 'they established the superiority of the Brahmans over the Shudras, and took away from them their ancestral occupation of soldiering'.[45] He emphasised the community of the *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras* of the present day with the suffering *Kshatriyas* of the past:

> When the Shudras and ati-Shudras of the present day reflect from which line they are descended, and whose blood and flesh is one with their own, it is no great surprise that when they hear of their sufferings they themselves feel the greatest of pain.[46]

38 Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 6.
39 ibid., p. 7. 40 ibid., p. 18. 41 ibid., p. 38. 42 ibid., p. 37. 43 ibid., p. 38.
44 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 74.
45 ibid., p. 120. 46 ibid., p. 87.

Phule preferred to use the terms *Shudra-ati-Shudra* or Mali-*kunbi* and Mang–Mahar to denote the community of the lower castes. He tried to avoid both terms 'Maratha' and 'Maharashtra', for reasons that were described in chapter 7. At the same time, however, he did set out to identify a central historical and cultural tradition in Maharashtra, and to describe the social groups, that represented this tradition in the present day. He had, therefore, to provide some account of these two terms. 'Maharashtra' he argued to have derived from 'maha-rashtra', the 'great country' over which King Bali had ruled. The term 'Maratha' had a connected origin: 'In the south, there were other lands under Bali's rule, which were called Maharashtra, and all the Kshetravasi people that lived there were called "Maharashtri"; the corruption of this must be "Marathe".'[47] The term in present-day society belonged properly to the community of the lower castes. Thus, the practice of Sunday worship was kept mainly by 'the Marathas of today, i.e. Mangs, Mahars, kunbis, and Malis'. In the Shivaji ballad, the men of the hilly country to the west and south of Pune, of whom Shivaji's armies were composed, are referred to as 'Marathas'. In Shivaji's attack on Shaista Khan in Pune:

> Jijabai's first home was in Pune
> The Khan lived in that house
> There was a watch on the city against the Marathas entering
> They were afraid of Shivaji.[48]

In so far as Phule did use the terms 'Maratha' and 'Maharashtra', then, he attempted to appropriate them for the whole community of middle and low castes, from peasant cultivators to untouchables. He intended this usage to reflect the broadening of the term 'Maratha' that we have already seen at work in western Indian society by the 1860s. However, Phule opened the term to include a range of non-Brahman castes far wider than the Maratha-*kunbi* caste grouping. The inclusion of Mahars and Mangs in the community of Marathas certainly went far beyond the relatively limited democratisation of the term that had already taken place. Phule was very sharply aware of the potential importance of the term as a symbol for the central traditions of Maharashtra's history and culture. At the time when Phule was writing, in the late 1860s, the term had not yet been taken up as a symbol in this way. This was not to take place until the 1880s. By that time, ideologues and polemicists of many different shades of opinion had begun to use new interpretations of symbols, figures, and episodes from

47 ibid., p. 105.
48 Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 24.

Maharashtra's history and culture to make statements and claims about their own contemporary society. The figure of Shivaji came also to stand as a powerful symbol of Maharashtra's 'essential' traditions. Shivaji became the object of rival interpretations by a range of different groups. Each was anxious to impress their own definitive meaning upon the figure of Shivaji and, through him, to gain access to a whole host of already existing popular loyalties. In the chapter that follows, we will examine Phule's treatment of Shivaji, and compare it with two other accounts written from very different perspectives. This will both illustrate the broader ideological context in which Phule was writing, and provide an introduction to the ideological debates that will be examined in the last part of this book.

10

*Maratha history as polemic: low caste ideology and political debate in late nineteenth-century Maharashtra**

Introduction

A striking feature of Marathi vernacular literature towards the end of the nineteenth century lies in the sudden surge of interest in the Maratha warrior hero, Shivaji, and his feats of leadership in the great expansions of Maratha power that took place in the seventeenth century. Of all the work on Shivaji written at this time, the most familiar is probably Mahadev Govind Ranade's *Rise of the Maratha Power*, published in 1891 in English. In addition, there appeared in the last three decades of the century an unusually large number of Marathi works celebrating Shivaji's exploits.[1]

This upsurge of interest in Shivaji was not confined to the vernacular literature. In the same period, Shivaji was also made the focus of a number of active groups and movements. Most familiar of these is, of course, the attempt by Bal Gangadhar Tilak to make Shivaji the symbol for a mass-based nationalist movement in Maharashtra. Other groups, such as the Shivaji Club in Kolhapur, active in the 1890s, tried to employ the figure of Shivaji in a series of quite different political projects.[2]

The exploits of Shivaji and his successors and the martial feats of his armies were a powerful and emotive subject for celebration in the rural society of pre-nineteenth-century Maharashtra. Stories from this period

* A longer version of this chapter appeared in *Modern Asian Studies*, 1, 17 January 1983.

1 Other examples of works on Shivaji published towards the end of the century were: Antaji Ramachandra Haradikar, *The Triumph of Shivaji*, Bombay 1891 (Marathi); Sitaram Narahar Dhavale, *A Play about the Child Shivaji*, Ratnagiri 1884 (Marathi); Krshnarao Arjun Keluskar, *The Life of Shivaji, of the Kshatriya Line*, Bombay 1907 (Marathi); Dattadas, *Ballads on the Life and Exploits of Shivaji*, Nagpur 1908 (Marathi); Govind Narayan Dattar, *The Life of the Chatrapati Shivaji*, Bombay 1906 (Marathi). Not all of these were written from the overtly polemical standpoint of the three works discussed here, but their existence is an indication of the intensity of interest in this period of Maratha history.

2 For accounts of the more nationalist oriented of these, see Richard Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya: Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra*, University of California Press, 1975; the essays by A. I. Chicherov and I. M. Reisner, in I. M. Reisner and N. M. Goldberg (eds.), *Tilak and the Struggle for Indian Freedom*, Delhi 1966; and Anil Samarth, *Shivaji and the Indian National Movement*, Somaiya Publications, Bombay 1975.

of Maratha history had always formed a central part of Maharashtra's rich oral tradition. These stories were most commonly told in the Marathi ballad form, the *pavada*. A *pavada* nearly always celebrated the deeds of Maratha heroes in battle. They were sung by Gondhalis, a sub-caste of professional musicians who would be called in to perform for most village festivals and entertainments. In these accounts of deeds of heroism by Shivaji, his lieutenants, and his armies, it is possible to gain some understanding of a worldview that was shared by most sections of Maharashtra's traditional rural society, from the ordinary cultivator to the elite Maratha landowner. For these groups, whose ancestors might have combined a martial career in Shivaji's armies with the life of a landowner or cultivator in the periods of peace, the figure of Shivaji could represent both those who owned the land and those who protected it and its people. Other groups in pre-nineteenth-century Maharashtra could likewise identify with the past glories of Maratha history, albeit in slightly different ways. The exploits of Brahman, Prabhu, Maratha, *kunbi*, and Mahar were all celebrated as examples of the heroism of Shivaji's followers. The best evidence for this largely pre-literate tradition, by which groups in rural society expressed a social and political identity through the celebration of episodes from Maratha history, is to be found in a large collection of Marathi *pavadas*. These were made by a British administrator, Harry Acworth, at the end of the nineteenth century.[3]

What was new about the *pavadas* and accounts of Shivaji's life and exploits that were published towards the end of the century was, first, that they were written down; and second, that they seem to have been written from a much more overtly ideological standpoint. The traditional *pavadas* which Acworth recorded clearly served a social and ideological purpose. In their descriptions of the qualities of warrior heroes, they presented symbols for the expression of group loyalties and a model of behaviour that derived in part from older *Kshatriya* images and values. As such, the Marathi *pavada* might be argued to have served to reinforce group loyalties and to integrate the quite disparate social and territorial groups led by the Maratha princes and their ministers.[4] The *pavadas* and other verse and prose works written in the

3 H. A. Acworth, *Ballads of the Marathas*, Bombay 1890. It should of course be borne in mind that no precise date can be given to these, as the products of an exclusively oral tradition. Acworth argues that the rise to popularity of *pavada* singing can be dated to the early seventeenth century, with the spread of the cult of Amba Bhavani of Tuljapur.

4 Here, in the idea that the symbols and images contained in Maharashtra's oral traditions served purposes of social and political integration, I am following Richard Fox's analysis of Rajput society in *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule*, University of California Press, 1971, pp. 164–73. Fox's work contains many insights that seem applicable to Maratha society.

late nineteenth century seem if anything to have served quite opposite, and socially disintegrative, purposes. In their accounts of Shivaji and his armies, they sought to elevate one leader or social group at the expense of others, and thus to advance contradictory and competing interpretations of Maharashtra's history and culture. In this way, the latter became an arena for the expression of conflicting political and social identities.

In this chapter, we will examine three such later nineteenth-century interpretations of the Shivaji period of Maratha history, each written from the perspective of quite different social groups. The first is Phule's *pavada* on Shivaji published in 1869. It presented him as the leader of Maharashtra's lower castes, and ascribed his achievements to the strength and skill of his *Shudra* and *ati-Shudra* armies, rather than to his Brahman ministers. The lower castes of Maharashtra, the tillers of the land and its protectors in times of war, thus provided the purpose and meaning behind the creation of the Maratha state. In this way he tried to make the *pavada* the vehicle for these groups' claims in the nineteenth century to stand as the rightful leaders of Maharashtrian society, and the representatives of its traditions.

The second account, published in 1889, was by a reformist Karhada Brahman, Rajaramashastri Bhagavat. Bhagavat argued that western Indian society had always been distinguished by the absence of social conflict and by its ability to synthesise the best in local and all-India religious culture into a harmonious whole. He regarded the achievements of Shivaji as the product of this harmony. The third account, a *pavada* by Ekanath Annaji Joshi, a Brahman conservative, published in 1887, displayed little interest in Maharashtra's local culture and religious traditions. It presented Shivaji as the saviour of orthodox Hinduism from the threat of Islam. Joshi's *pavada* also spoke implicitly against the corruption of Hindu religion by western influences in the nineteenth century.

The comparison between these two and Phule's account illustrates the broader ideological context in which Phule was writing. The great importance of the figure of Shivaji to politicians and ideologues, right across the political spectrum, lay in its ability to give access to loyalties and identities that already existed in popular culture. The social groups in Hindu society, to which any would-be leader of a mass movement in western India would have to address himself, were still rooted in rural culture. These groups were pre-literate, and they lacked the political and educational skills that were necessary to engage in the new modes of formal and organised political activity that were coming to dominate political life towards the end of the century. As later lower caste

activists were to find to their cost, few local notables or village leaders conceived of their roles in local society in terms of the meetings of committees, the holding of conferences, or the raising of funds for any collective or supra-caste purpose. However, it was possible to see, in the figure of Shivaji, and the popular memory of the glories of the Maratha past, some of the ways in which such social groups did conceive of their social and political identities. It was precisely this strong and already existing emotional identification that allowed politicians, from Phule to Tilak, to employ the figure of Shivaji in the attempt to attract a mass following. In writing *pavadas* about Shivaji therefore, Phule and others tried to place themselves within an already existing tradition, to express themselves in the sort of language that would be understood amongst the agricultural and landowning castes of rural Maharashtra. These divergent accounts of the same events of necessity competed with each other. As we shall see, the three writers were either actually aware of each other's work and ideas, or were writing for the same publications.

The great expansion of Maratha power in the seventeenth century, and Shivaji's wars with the Mughals, could be interpreted in a number of ways and used to make statements about society and politics in Maharashtra in the nineteenth century. In Shivaji's exploits might be seen the past glories of the *kunbis* and Marathas of western Maharashtra, the men who formed the body of Shivaji's armies, and the decline of Maratha power attributed to the growth of Brahman influence, as effective leadership was transferred to the Brahman peshwas. At the other extreme, Shivaji's success might be attributed to his Brahman adviser, Ramdas. Shivaji's own intentions might be interpreted in a number of different ways. In his wars against Muslim rule, he might be seen as *go-Brahman pratipalak*, the protector of cows and Brahmans, and hence of an older-style Hindu religion. Alternatively, his attempts to lead his Maratha and *kunbi* armies to every corner of India might be interpreted as an attempt to extend the power of these numerically dominant castes. The evidence of co-operation between all castes in the Maratha administration, and Shivaji's own policy of attempting to achieve a balance of power between Brahmans, Prabhus, Marathas, and lower castes presented an opportunity for a view of Maharashtra's history and culture which stressed social harmony and a genuine synthesis between local traditions and the social structures laid down in the social theory of classical Hinduism. Another source for differences in interpretation lay in the ambiguity of the status of Shivaji in *varna* terms. As we have seen, Shivaji had been invested with the sacred thread at his investiture in 1674, when there had been some dispute

over his right to Vedic ritual.[5] The possibility of ascribing to Shivaji either *Kshatriya* or *Shudra varna* status was a reflection of the more general indeterminacy for quite large groups in rural society of *varna* status, in a local culture which contained both a martial and an agricultural tradition, and families claiming Rajput descent on the basis of genealogies which could be rewritten to accommodate new claimants. By extension, the question of Shivaji's status in *varna* terms raised the issue concerning all groups and families in rural society who claimed to be true Marathas of Rajput descent. Shivaji's investiture with the sacred thread at his coronation could thus form a focus for all Maratha aspirations towards *Kshatriya* status. His martial exploits and his *de facto* position as a ruler could be seen more generally as backing for the claims that later formed so prominent a part of non-Brahman and Maratha ideology: the claim to stand as the *Kshatriyas* of Maharashtra, the rightful protectors of the land and the leaders of the people. Shivaji's career also presented ideal material for anti-British and nationalist interpretations, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak's attempts to employ Shivaji as a symbol in this way have been well documented.

A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale

It is worth noting that Phule's work, published in 1869, stands as one of the very earliest printed Marathi accounts of Shivaji's life, some thirty-one years before M. G. Ranade's more famous *Rise of the Maratha Power*, and twenty-five years before Tilak's attempt to use Shivaji as a symbol of struggle against foreign rule. It was written eight years before the next obviously 'political' *pavada* that I have been able to locate. Here, it is possible to see Phule's characteristic sensitivity to social and political symbols that formed one of his greatest strengths as a polemicist and ideologue.

There is another dimension to the *pavada* which should be emphasised because it might easily be lost in the somewhat disintegrative process of analysis. The *pavada* was not merely a partisan account. It is filled with a genuine sense of awe and celebration at the achievements of

5 The best account of the dispute is in Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times*, Bombay 1920, pp. 204–14. It is significant that Phule does not mention this episode in his own account of Shivaji. Shivaji's seventeenth-century claims to *Kshatriya* status would have been of a much more conventional kind than the sort of identity that Phule projected for all lower castes. Shivaji employed Brahmans both to declare him a *Kshatriya* in genealogical terms and to perform the actual ceremonies. Hence, a reference to Shivaji's own mode of claiming *Kshatriya* status would have tended to cast doubt on Phule's assertion that the *Kshatriya* identity of the lower castes had preceded all the social stratifications of Brahmanic religion, and might hence be used as a ground for their complete rejection.

Shivaji and with a great love for, and identification with, the wild and rugged landscape of western Maharashtra from which he drew the inspiration for an independent base, and the hardy troops necessary to realise his plans. Here, in this fusion of his own social polemic with a series of symbols that were at once well known, potent, and intensely evocative, Phule achieved one of the most compelling expressions of his worldview.

Phule was clearly aware of the potential for different interpretations which the Shivaji period presented, and of the danger of its appropriation by rival worldviews. In *Slavery*, published four years later, he warned of Brahman influence in the education of the lower castes: 'The Brahmans tell them all sorts of tales about ignorant and credulous Shudra Kings like Shivaji, who freed the country from foreign unbelievers, and sought to protect cows and Brahmans, and so they fill them with false religious patriotism.'[6]

Phule did not stop with the figure of Shivaji in his attempt to recruit symbols from popular culture to the cause of the lower castes. His account of the ancient history of India formed a second dimension to the ballad. The triumphs of the *deshi* and *mavali* armies of Shivaji[7] recalled the more ancient martial past of the *Shudra Kshatriyas* under King Bali, and the meaning of Shivaji's career became the inheritance of the mantle of King Bali in the leadership of the lower castes and the protection of the land from foreign conquest. The ballad opened with an account of the battle between Bali and Parashuram:

> The child of the great warrior Kshatriyas
> in the third age, in the time of the Yavanas
> By nature courageous, they feared him in battle
> he fought ceaselessly for his country
> Such a great power afflicted Parashuram sorely
> twenty-one times, one after the other.
> Such great warriors were called great enemies
> they made the sons of the twice-born tremble

6 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, D. Keer and S. G. Malshe (eds.), pp. 114–15. Phule's assignment of a *Shudra* status here to Shivaji is made only within the context of his more general assertion of the real *Kshatriya* identity of all *Shudras*. What is more difficult to assess is exactly what *varna* status would have been popularly ascribed to Shivaji in the period in which Phule was writing. As we saw in chapter 2, this issue was certainly a very sensitive one in the 1820s and 1830s, both among elite Marathas and the Brahman guardians of Hindu orthodoxy. This divergence was to remain as an aspect of the more fundamental controversy over the role and the interrelations of these groups in Maharashtra's history until the public association of Shivaji with the nationalist cause in the 1890s.

7 These two Marathi terms are drawn from the words *deshi*, the flat uplands of the Deccan and *maval*, the rugged terrain of the Sahayadri range to the south and west of Pune. It was from these areas that Shivaji drew most of his troops in the early part of his campaigns.

Denied them learning when they were defeated
they called them maha-ari and mang
Fearful, they took revenge of the conquered enemy
like a snake, the son of ingratitude.[8]

In beginning his ballad with an account of King Bali, Phule attempted to assimilate Shivaji into a much older tradition of great non-Brahman rulers and protectors of the common man. In the short prose introduction to the work, Phule went straight to the point as to its purpose, 'that it may be useful to the kunbis, Malis, Mangs, and Mahars, the ruined Kshatriyas'.[9] He explained that he had been careful to write it in language that would appeal to these classes: 'I have altogether avoided using great long Sanskrit words. Wherever I have been able, I have used short words just enough to convey my meaning. I have worked very hard to put it in easy language that the Malis and kunbis will understand, and to write something in a way that they will like.'[10]

The ballad began:

I sing the ballad of Bhosale, the jewel of the kulavadis
Of Chatrapati Shivaji
The patron of the kunbis, he gives the sacred thread to
his caste brothers
The destroyer of the Muslims.[11]

It was through the figure of Shivaji, as the representative of the older tradition of King Bali, that the *kulavadis* or *kunbis* were linked with their older identity as *Kshatriyas*: thus Shivaji was said to have given the 'sacred thread', the mark of *Kshatriya* status, to his caste brothers.

Having described the beauty of the young Shivaji in conventional terms, Phule inserted an episode which appears to be entirely of his own creation. His mother, Jijabai, led him into the garden, sat him down and told him the story of their ancestors, the *Kshatriyas* of pre-Aryan India. The country's weakness before the Muslims was ascribed to the previous Brahman persecution of the martial races, and Shivaji's anger against the Muslims rose when he saw this was the second time that his country had suffered in this way:

She recalled for him the memory of his ancestors
Tears filled her eyes

The lords of the land destroyed
She told him what had happened in ancient times

Because they were living on the land they were called
Kshatriyas
On the land they lived happily.[12]

8 Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 6. The term 'Yavana' here refers to the Muslims.
9 ibid., p. 7. 10 ibid. 11 ibid., p. 9. 12 ibid., pp. 12–13.

She described to him the great happiness of pre-Aryan *Kshatriyas*, 'your forefathers', their destruction at the hands of Brahma and Parashuram, and the eventual victory of the Muslims in India. Thus Phule presented his own version of the source of Shivaji's inspiration:

> As his mother's teaching was impressed upon his mind,
> his rage against the Yavanas grew,
> And he made his plan to fight them.[13]

He denied that Shivaji's Brahman teacher, Ramdas, had any great influence on him:

> Who should be the guru of the fish that play in the water?[14]

Phule recounted Shivaji's early exploits in making war: the capture of the forts of Torana, Sinhagad, Purandar, Rajamachi, Lohagad, and Tikona, strategic forts in the rugged terrain to the south and west of Pune. In this invocation of names, all of them a familiar part of the landscape of western Maharashtra, he attempted to conjure up for his reader each part of the land itself, to endow it with a new significance, evoking the exploits of the soldier–cultivators of the country and the glories of their leader, Shivaji. Phule dwelt at length on Shivaji's unequalled power:

> For four years there was no controlling Shivaji
> The son was devoted to his father
> He killed Chandrarao More and took Javali
> He took another fort, Vasota,
> He built Pratapagad and made someone there peshwa
> He devised new titles
>
> He sent threatening letters to those who treated him
> dishonourably
> He sent his men to plunder
> By a back road they went quietly to Ahmadnagar
> They looted elephants and horses
> Fine clothes, jewels, gold coins – no price could be set
> on the riches
> He took the Baragir into his service
> He took forts on the sea shore and started keeping boats
> He took the Pathans under him.[15]

In this description of the deeds and successes of their leader, Phule invited his *Shudra* audience to experience the same sense of power vicariously, to assert that despite their lowly rank in the present scale of social and religious values, there had been a time when no opponent

13 ibid., p. 14. 14 ibid., p. 15.
15 ibid., pp. 16–17. Note here Phule's deliberately off-hand reference to the first delegation of Shivaji's authority to the Brahman peshwas of the fort of Pratapagad.

could stand before them, the memory of which should create a bitter dissatisfaction with present-day society.

Having described the famous encounter between Shivaji and Afzul Khan, the prolonged fight with Siddhi Johar, and the brave stand made by Murarji Baji Prabhu and the *mavalis*, Phule then inserted a short passage on the role of the divine in human affairs. As we saw in chapter 5, the Shivaji ballad was dedicated to Ramachandra Balakrshna Jayakar, the president of the Paramahansa Mandali. The idea of the divine that Phule presented here, of a Creator essentially separate from the natural world and the social order, although he may act in the latter as Providence, was very much in keeping with the religious ideas of the Mandali, and with Phule's own earlier religious position. In the introduction to the ballad, he had described how:

> The Supreme Being, the Creator of the world, who watches over the whole world and who gives wisdom to all, felt pity for us poor Shudras, so he made his most beloved children, the English, into rulers, and sent them to India to free us Kshatriyas from the snares of the Brahman devils.[16]

Phule continued with this theme and presented a view of the divine nature in keeping with his more general ideological position:

> The first and eternal one; the cause of all
> Life and death; he gives sustenance
> Only he can save; only he can strike down
> He watches over everything; the cause of all movement
> Constant care; he gives direction
> I will look into the past; I will reflect in my mind
> Pronouncing the name, the life of the world
> Keep your balance and seek
> Understand the meaning and cut your bonds.[17]

Phule did not use the figure of Shivaji to enjoin the protection of the particular religious form of Hinduism in the way that the more conventional writers also examined here employed him. As the basis of man's religious life, Phule put forward the diametrically opposite idea of a unitary deity who, in his power and justice, transcended all human social and religious arrangements. His justice manifested itself as Providence in human affairs, but he was immeasurably removed from them. Besides his great majesty and power, particular human religious arrangements appeared arbitrary and insignificant, the products of self-interest or delusion. Moreover, the very freedom which this distance between the divine and the merely social order allowed to the human individual acted as an injunction upon him to use his powers of reason and rational criticism to reconstruct his social world. This

16 ibid., p. 7. 17 ibid., p. 21.

freedom was conditioned only by the justice inherent in the divine nature. In the last four lines of the passage, the poet urged his audience to reflect upon their own condition, to look into the past – the view of the past which Phule had presented earlier in the ballad – and to cut the bonds of the present.

Throughout the ballad, Phule preferred to emphasise Shivaji as the man of action, the leader of the *deshis* and *mavalis*, rather than as the wise statesman and administrator, deliberating with his Brahman counsellors. He made great play with the daring escape of Shivaji and his son from Delhi:

> The Mughal thought that Shivaji had lost hope
> He congratulated himself
> The father and son lie in the baskets instead of the bread
> The rest they leave to the servants
> Making haste the servants take the baskets
> They do the marvellous deed at night
> They leave Delhi and set Shivaji free
> They carried out the plan.
> In the morning the Mughal gnashed his teeth
> He sent the Majam after him
> Shivaji outwitted Aurangzeb; he took to horseback with his son
> He put his son in front; he pretended to be a gosavi
> They turned night into day; they reached Raigad
> He bowed at his mother's feet.[18]

Phule ran through the other standard episodes of Shivaji's career: the assault on Sinhagad with Tanaji Malusre, the second sack of Surat; the levy of *chaut* in Khandesh, the exploits of Gujar and Moroba Pathan, and the defeat of the next Muslim commander sent against him, Khan Jehan. In all these Phule emphasised the bravery of the men of Shivaji's army and the latter's skill as a warrior, and the great power wielded by them together.

The 'meaning' of Shivaji's career for Phule, then, did not lie in any direct formula such as the protection of the symbols of conventional Hindu religion – the cow and the Brahman – from the Muslims, or the establishment of an independent Hindu empire. Instead he used Shivaji's career as a vehicle to convey an idea of the glorious martial past of the lower castes of western Maharashtra. This in turn recalled the more ancient martial past of the *Shudra Kshatriyas* under King Bali, so that the Muslim invasion appeared not primarily as a threat to the Hindu religion, but as a repetition of a previous invasion by an alien

18 ibid., pp. 29–30.

social and religious power. Phule drew all this together most effectively in the song sung by Shivaji's followers at his death, which combines a powerful emotional appeal with the most precise polemic:

> Speak to us, Maharaj, why do you not speak
> With your companions, your mavali troops, you waged war freely
> You suffered heat and thirst; you had no fear of the rain
> You wandered the hills and valleys; you brought the Yavana to his knees
> You plundered many lands; you made our race great
> With deep wisdom you fought; performed marvellous deeds on the earth
> Although you gathered riches, you spent them wisely
> You shared them with your soldiers – you had no love for wealth
> Clever and attentive, you foreswore idleness
> The small and the great troops – you never forgot them
> King first among the Kshatriyas (the Shudras of the Deccan) you were without equal.[19]

Phule emphasised Shivaji's concern with the tillers of the soil, the parallel to Maharashtra's martial tradition:

> He gave life to the peasants
> He did not deprive the cultivators of their happiness;
> He passed new regulations
> Both great and small have redress
> No one suffered oppression.[20]

Phule fused a sense of celebration at Shivaji's marvellous exploits, his identification with the common man, the soldier, and the tiller of the soil, and the vision of this same common man as the original master of the land. It was a cry from the heart of the leaderless *Shudra* of the present, in protest at the contrast between the greatness he had once known and his present rank as the servant of the other three *varnas*.

From the identification with the tradition of King Bali, Phule passed to a direct description of the tyranny of the Brahmans in the present, appealing to the figurehead of British power:

> Oh Queen, you have the power; Hindusthan is asleep
> Everywhere, there is the rule of the Brahmans; open your eyes and see
> In the small villages, the kulkarnis are the masters of the pen
> In the provinces they hold great offices; thus they have high authority
> Like Yama, the mamledar gives the Shudras ceaseless punishment

19 ibid., p. 37. 20 ibid.

The poor foolish collector stands before the cunning Chitnis
How great is the authority of the Brahmans in the revenue departments
The Bhats are everywhere; the kunbis have no redress
Joti says, we run for help; deliver us from these evils.[21]

It is worth looking briefly at some of the reviews that Phule's ballad received. A short review appeared in the literary journal *Vividhadnyan Vistar*, to which Phule had evidently sent a copy:

> The ballad on Raja Chatrapati Shivaji. A copy of this has come to us. The author is some Mr Jotirao Govindrao Phule or other. When we read this work we thought that to accept it would bring sheer disgrace upon the great and courageous Shivaji, and upon all Hindu people. We have no idea of the author's address, so we are afraid we are unable to send it back to him.[22]

Another review appeared in the *Dnyanodaya* of 16 August 1869, which was scarcely more charitable about Phule's ability as an historian. Finally, a letter from the Christian convert Baba Padmanji to the *Dnyanodaya* of 1 September 1869 gives us a fascinating glimpse of the kinds of controversy that Phule's ideas sometimes caused among his friends and colleagues. In the introduction to the ballad, Phule had thanked Baba Padmanji for his help with the piece. But, Padmanji said, all he had done was to help read the proofs. The responsibility for the opinions in the ballad was Phule's alone. 'I had previously suggested to Mr Jotiba that these opinions might go against the evidence of history. But he insisted firmly that his opinions should be published as they were, and if anyone should stand up to criticise them, he would answer them himself.'

Rajaramashastri Bhagavat: the community of Maharashtra

It was not until the end of the 1870s that the interpretation of Shivaji's career for contemporary ideological purposes really gathered momentum, which makes comparison with Phule's work, published in 1869, somewhat difficult. In 1871, Ramachandra Bhikaji Gunjikar published his *Mochangad*, a historical novel set in Shivaji's time, but which is centred on a series of fictitious characters in one of the hill forts of the Deccan. In 1873, Ganesh Shastri Lele published a life of Shivaji in verse, which was followed by one in 1874 by Keshav Laksman

21 ibid., p. 38. Yama is the Hindu god of death.
22 *Vividhadnyan Vistar*, July 1869 (Marathi). A full series of this periodical is available in the Jayakar Library, University of Pune.

Joravekar.[23] But the pieces which present the most illuminating contrasts to Phule's work are published slightly later, when the figure of Shivaji was beginning to be taken up as a symbol of the independence of Maharashtra and of Hindus more generally.

Rajaramashastri Bhagavat was a prolific essayist, and much of his work was published in the *Vividhadnyan Vistar* which had rejected Phule's ballad with such adverse comment. Bhagavat combined the career of a professor of Sanskrit at St Xavier's College, Bombay, with that of an active social refomer.[24] He was greatly concerned with the condition of the lower castes, questioning the division of society on the basis of birth. He advocated interdining and intermarriage. He presents an interesting contrast with Phule because he combined this social reformism with a view of the history and culture of Maharashtra which Phule would almost certainly have rejected. Bhagavat expressed his interpretation of Maharashtra's history and society in two works apart from his life of Shivaji: *The dharma of Maharashtra*, published in 1895, and *A few words about the Marathas*, published in 1887. This view stressed the harmony and co-operation which existed between all castes in Maharashtra, and was indeed the defining quality of its culture, responsible for its periods of greatness. Bhagavat also asserted the existence of a pool of common social and religious culture, the integration of the all-India worldview of Hinduism into a distinctive local religious tradition, largely through the work of the saint–poets. He expressed the idea of this pool of common culture, which transcended the boundaries of caste, in the term *Maharashtramandal*, the community of Maharashtra. This combination of a moderate social reformism with the assertion of a national identity deriving from the idea of a local community united in its political and religious traditions represented a fairly common set of opinions among moderate politicians in the 1880s.[25]

Bhagavat argued that the period of history under Shivaji represented the second rise to pre-eminence of the Marathas, the first having taken

23 R. B. Gunjikar, *Mochangad*, Pune 1871 (Marathi); Ganesh Shastri Lele, *The Life of Shivaji*, Bombay 1873 (Marathi); and Keshav Laksman Joravekar, *The Sports of Shivaji*, Bombay 1874 (Marathi). For a general account of the development of Marathi literature in this period, see Ian Raeside, 'Early Prose Fiction in Marathi', in T. W. Clark (ed.), *The Novel in India*, Allen and Unwin, London 1970, pp. 75–101.

24 For an account of his life, see Durga Bhagavat, *Rajaramashastri Bhagavat*, Bombay 1947 (Marathi).

25 The most notable example of this kind of moderate social reformism combined with pride in local tradition was, of course, the work of M. G. Ranade. In his work *Rise of the Maratha Power*, published in Bombay in 1891, he argued that the rise of the Maratha power represented a genuine effort on the part of a Hindu nationality to achieve 'a Confederacy of States animated by a common patriotism'. This sense of unity derived from the social and religious culture that was shared by all classes in Maharashtra.

place under the Jadhavas in medieval Maharashtra. He emphasised the role of Brahmans as religious advisers, citing the influence of Mukundraj, and the absence of caste divisions: 'At that time, neither the Brahmans nor the non-Brahmans among the Marathas paid any attention whatsoever to the divisions of caste, but were concerned only for the good of the community, celebrating their own name with that of the community of Maharashtra.'[26] He emphasised the religious unity of all the Marathas, expressed in the writings of the saint–poets, who saw God as everywhere the same, and had no regard for social barriers. There was little division between Brahmans and *Kshatriyas*, as even Brahmans sometimes took up the sword: 'In short, all Marathas of every caste put their best foot forward in matters of politics, religion and the affairs of the home, and movements of every kind started among the community of Maharashtra.'[27]

The second great period of Maharashtra's prosperity came with the rise of Shivaji. The strength of feeling for unity among all Marathas was revealed in the co-operation between the Marathas and the Muslims of Hyderabad. This quality of 'Maharashtra-ness' existed as the very opposite of feelings of caste or religious division:

> If Islamic feeling among the men of the Nizam's state grew, still the quality of Maharashtra-ness was contained in them, and their minds were drawn to the Hindu Marathas. The strength of this quality grew greater, and with generous minds they paid no attention to divisions of religion, and gave their support to their countrymen.[28]

For Bhagavat, the idea of the integrity of local culture took precedence over attachment to the all-India religious tradition. But this local culture had its own distinctive religious tradition, loyalty to which took precedence once that was threatened: 'Just as Ekanathsvami started a great religious movement among the community of Maharashtra, so Shivaji started a great political movement, and in the end once more established the kingdom of the Marathas, freeing his brothers in language, country and religion from the tyranny of the Muslims.'[29]

Bhagavat described the encounter between Dilir Khan and Murarji Baji Prabhu during the seige of Purandar, and the marvellous courage of the latter in storming the Khan's camp with a handful of *mavalis*:

> Why should it surprise us that Dilir Khan paused for a moment to wonder at the courage of this boundless devotion to Shivaji and to the land of his birth, in this great example to his countrymen? If you are looking for examples of the resolution, strength and enthusiasm of the people of the community of Maharashtra – both Brahmans and non-Brahmans – then you should look at this picture from the history of the Marathas.[30]

26 Rajaramashastri Bhagavat, *The Life of Shivaji*, Bombay 1889, p. 8.
27 ibid., p. 9. 28 ibid., pp. 14–15. 29 ibid., p. 19. 30 ibid., p. 34.

He praised the stand made by this Baji Prabhu's caste-fellow, Baji Prabhu Pasalakar, against the forces of Siddhi Johar near Panhala: 'It is an honour worthy of being cherished by every Maharashtrian that men like this Baji, a gem of a hero, have been born from the womb of Mother Maharashtra.'[31]

Here, Bhagavat's idea of a united Maharashtra, with its own identity representing an ideal of service and loyalty to the community, had much in common with Phule's depiction of a local community united against an external enemy. But the social constitution of the two communities was quite different: for Phule, the Marathas were strictly the community of the non-Brahman castes, while Bhagavat regarded Marathas as those who are 'brothers in language, country, and religion'. Bhagavat saw Hindu religion not as some remote, supra-local worldview imposed by an alien power, but as a central element in the community, integrated into its religious life to form a distinctive local tradition. Phule denied the existence of any such integration between Brahmanic religion and popular culture, indeed ascribed to the former the alien and coercive role that in Bhagavat's view was given to Islam.

Bhagavat placed Shivaji's Brahman advisers at the centre of the community of Maharashtra. He described Raghunath Hanamante, the erstwhile Brahman regent of Shivaji's younger brother Venkaji, who resigned after his embezzlement of public funds was discovered and who joined Shivaji's court, promising to help him claim his lawful share of the patrimony left by Shivaji's father: 'We Brahmans among the community of Maharashtra should cherish it as a great honour that there were in previous times among us many Brahmans like Raghunath, who cared for the welfare of their own people and their own masters; even now, a few of them still shine forth.'[32]

Here, then, it is possible to see how this account of Shivaji might form part of the worldview of a reformist Brahman with a strong pride in local Maharashtrian tradition. Besides their simultaneous declarations of loyalty to quite divergent ideas of the local community, another significant point of comparison between Phule's work and Bhagavat's lies in the way in which both moved in dialectical fashion between the local and the all-India level of political and religious identity. Both conflated the two for their different ideological purposes. While Phule identified the tradition of pre-Aryan *Kshatriyas* with that of India itself, and so placed himself on the all-India level on which he confronted Brahmanic Hinduism, so Bhagavat, like other writers using the figure of Shivaji to assert a national identity, employed him as a kind of

31 ibid., p. 41. 32 ibid., p. 53.

shorthand for the potential existence of a more general national Hindu identity in the face of British rule.

Ekanath Annaji Joshi: Shivaji, protector of Hindu religion

Joshi published his work, *The advice given to Maharaja Shivaji by Dadoji Kondadev*, in 1877.[33] It was concerned above all with the violation of the Hindu religion committed by the Muslims, and with Shivaji's role as its protector. It emphasised the all-India tradition of Hinduism, as against any integration of that tradition with the local culture of Maharashtra. This may well be the piece to which Phule himself referred in his letter to Mama Paramanand of 2 June 1886. Having complained that most English historians had not properly appreciated the real conditions of the *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras* because they had relied on the books and the verbal accounts of Brahmans, he said:

> And nowadays some learned Brahman youngsters are making up new ballads and have slowly brought them out into the open. I have also seen many of them, but I have not made a collection of them because many present an account in which Dadoji Kondadev, with his cows and Brahmans, take all the credit which was earned by the Shudras.[34]

In the introduction to the poem, we are told that it had been sent to the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, who had accepted it and given the author Rs 50; Phule's own work had earlier been turned down by the committee. Joshi was an assistant schoolmaster at the English school at Indore. He does not appear to have had a notable career as an active politician, but took a prominent part in Indore's *sabha* for the study of local history.[35] But the poem itself, both in form and content, expressed a coherent view of Indian history and the Hindu religion which formed a perfect contrast to that given by Phule. While Phule set out his determination to avoid long Sanskrit words, and to make his poem comprehensible to the most unlettered reader, Joshi's piece was highly

33 Dadoji Kondadev was the Brahman governor of Pune district appointed by Shivaji's father, Shahaji. As the latter's factor, he was supposed always to have been very timid about Shivaji's schemes of expansion, but on his deathbed gave his blessing to the re-establishment of an independent Hindu power.

34 Jotirao Phule to Mama Paramanand, 2 June 1886, reprinted in Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 325. This appears to be one of the very few letters of Phule's, apart from those written to newspapers, that have survived. Narayanrao Paramanand was an influential social reformer active in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and a close associate of M. G. Ranade.

35 G. C. Bhate, *A History of Modern Marathi Literature, 1880–1938*, Pune 1939, p. 228. See also the introduction to the poem, which mentions the part that Joshi took in a society for the study of history in Indore.

Sanskritised. It was written in *shloka* and Joshi seemed to model himself on eighteenth-century writers, such as Mukteshvara, in the intricate and ornate style of his Marathi.[36]

The poem itself consisted of a lengthy piece of exhortation, by Dadoji Kondadev to Shivaji, to rescue India and the Hindu religion from the depredations of the Muslims. One of Joshi's main devices was to contrast the India of Shivaji's time, humiliated and impoverished by foreign rule, with the familiar idea of a golden age of Hindu India, in which the gods were properly respected, when great sages and *rshis* guided men in the truths of religion, where ascetics performed great feats of penance, where cows and Brahmans were held in proper reverence and ordinary men did not desert the path of their *dharma*, where great leaders arose in times of danger, and the land itself prospered. This idea of the golden age of Hindus in India, in which the people were governed in equity and goodness and protected from all enemies, formed an idealised picture in popular Hindu thought more generally expressed in the familiar term, *Ramaraj*, 'the kingdom of Rama'.[37] Although the idea of *Ramaraj* connoted a rule of justice and prosperity for all, it was of course, a highly conditional one – it was justice and prosperity in the terms of a strongly Brahman-oriented version of Hindu religion. *Ramaraj*, the ideal society from the point of view of the orthodox Hindu, which Joshi invoked in a typical form, may be compared with Phule's kingdom of Bali. Phule set up just such a golden age in the idea of Bali's kingdom, *Baliraj*, but the society which he described was the very negation of *Ramaraj*. All that was most cherished in the latter was seen as the enemy, the destroyer of what was the true golden age of India, in which the guiding principle of men's lives was their identification with the land and their determination to protect it as a community under the leadership of Bali and the Khandobas. Here then, it is possible to see another level on which Phule attempted to provide a substitute, based on popular religious culture, for the categories of thought of conventional Hinduism. Instead of yearning for the lost age of *Ramaraj*, and casting his thought in the idiom of orthodox Hinduism, the reader of Phule's work could

36 Mukteshvara was one of the eighteenth-century pandit poets, writing puranic stories in highly Sanskritised Marathi.

37 Molesworth describes the popular conception of *Ramaraj*: 'A term for a kingdom in which the people are protected from all enemies and are governed in equity and goodness.' *Marathi–English Dictionary*, p. 694. The term refers, of course, to the rule of Rama described in the *Ramayana*. It still has significance in the twentieth-century Maharashtra. Thus the Rama Raja Parishad, a right-wing Hindu communalist party founded in 1948, campaigned for a return to the rectitude of the age of Rama.

free himself from these categories, and envisage the golden age as depicted by Phule.

The political content of Joshi's work also provided a contrast with that of Phule. As in the case of Bhagavat, the political purposes of Joshi's poem always remain implicit. But it would have been difficult, in the context of British rule and all the controversies about the subversion of Hinduism that had accompanied it from the early part of the century, to read Joshi's invective against foreign rule and the corruption of the Hindu religion without making some comparisons between the seventeenth century and the nineteenth. Joshi's piece used the figure of Shivaji to inveigh against the corruption of Hinduism and the humiliation and impoverishment of India from whatever source, whether Muslim or British. He assimilated the figures of Shivaji and Dadoji Kondadev to this defence of Hindu tradition. Shivaji he presented in the very terms which Phule most condemned: as the defender of cows and Brahmans, the symbols of orthodox Hinduism. He regarded Brahmans as the main source of influence behind Shivaji's decision to found an independent base from which to challenge Muslim power. Finally, an interesting point of comparison between all three pieces examined here may be made with reference to their attitudes to local and to all-India traditions. As we have seen, both Phule and Bhagavat have, in their different ways, a great regard for the local religious traditions and social structures. In Phule's case, this was because his perception of a local social and religious culture that specifically excluded Brahmans formed the material for his constitution of a community of the oppressed. Where Bhagavat was concerned, his perception of a local social and religious community, into which had been integrated the best aspects of all-India Hinduism, formed the basis for his intense admiration for Maharashtra and the Marathas. Joshi, on the other hand, had very little concern for the local tradition as such. For him, the figure of Shivaji was merely a vehicle through which the cause of a supra-local Hindu tradition might be very effectively advocated. Shivaji was assimilated directly to the traditions of classical Hindu mythology, in which the gods had appeared on earth in the form of great heroes to rescue India from some grave danger. Shivaji was presented as the latest in the line of great *Kshatriya* heroes (here, of course, the term is used in its conventional sense), to which had belonged Rama, Bharata, Bhishma, Bhima, Balaram, and Krshna.

In Joshi's piece, *The advice given to Maharaja Shivaji by Dadoji Kondadev*, Dadoji first described the exploits of Shivaji's grandfather and father in the struggle against the Muslims. He told Shivaji of the blessings of independence, the very life-blood of any country. It

adorned a country, he said, like the jewel Kaustubh adorned the neck of Krshna. He compared independence to the water that made a tree grow, and an enemy to the heat that dried it up, and exhorted Shivaji to take whatever action was necessary to defend the country. All this was by way of preliminary to a description of the former greatness of India:

> As the Ganges is amongst rivers, so she was the greatest of them all
> Filled with a vast store of happiness;
> How great the light of her learning, her talents, her fortune
> How large her trade and industry, her desire for commerce
> Do I have to tell you all this? In this high position all sorts of progress
> Had been achieved; there was nothing less than excellence anywhere
> How magnificent were the exploits of her Kings
> Always righteousness in justice, religion and the protection of the weak
> The mere mention of whose name was enough to fill the mind with reverence.[38]

But Joshi made it quite clear that these virtues were highly particular ones, identifying the greatness of India with the literary and cultural achievements of classical Hinduism. This was the land in which Manu had related the true principles of *dharma* to the people, in which Valmiki had narrated the *Ramayana*, in which the *Mahabharata* and the *puranas* had been conceived. Here, ascetics had carried out great feats of endurance, with only the thought of Brahma in their minds. This was the land in which great *rshis* devoted to *karma* had lived and virtuous Brahman priests who had done sacrifices to achieve *moksa*, or freedom from the cycle of human rebirths. Here, the noble kings of the Raghav family, Rama and Yudhisthira, had carried out the *ashvamedha* horse sacrifice to show the extent of their dominions. This was the place where Vikram and the poets had flourished, a land filled with beautiful temples, as if Mount Meru itself had taken on different shapes. Here, the name of Hari was on every man's lips, and each was fixed in his proper *dharma*. The people, he concludes, were as if floating on a sea of happiness.[39]

Through the medium of Dadoji's advice, Joshi then turned to the condition to which the country had been brought by foreign rule. He described how the people wandered here and there like flocks of sheep, without guidance or protection, harassed and tormented by the Mus-

38 Ekanath Annaji Joshi, *The advice given to Maharaja Shivaji by Dadoji Kondadev*, Bombay 1877 (Marathi), p. 13. 39 ibid., pp. 15–16.

lims, stripped of their wealth and filled with fear. He compared it to the sufferings of the earth described in the *puranas*:

> As it happened before in the puranas, when demons were everywhere
> We now see before us in this very country, with our own eyes![40]

Significantly, Joshi here takes as his examples of the demons that troubled the gods some of the figures which Phule himself had described as the original leaders of the *Kshatriyas* – the Daitya kings, Hiranyaksa and his brother – and the *raksas* king, Ravana. Here then we see the conventions of the orthodox tradition for which Phule tried to create an alternative. However, Dadoji continued, he had yet to tell the worst:

> When there were raksas and Daityas, there was at least this,
> That no one actually corrupted their own religion; though there was a shower of troubles
> Still everyone worshipped their own gods and obtained favour
> In those days there was no place for the corruption of religion.[41]

But now, Dadoji lamented, the Hindu religion itself had fallen victim to pollution by other faiths; and it is hard here to escape the feeling that Joshi did not just mean Islam. He related how, where there were once temples, now appeared the tombs of Muslim *pirs*. People talked of Allah where once they talked of Narayan. Where once the auspicious *palkhis* of the gods had been carried in procession, now appeared the *taje* in the processions of Muharram. At Somnath, at Kashi and Ujjain, and in Orissa, the Muslims had smashed idols and destroyed the glory of the gods. He asked Shivaji:

> Do I have to tell you all their crimes against religion, one by one?
> I cannot bear to talk of these terrible deeds.[42]

From the state of religion, he turned his attention to the condition of the people. Clad only in rags, with a rude hut for shelter, the farmer sweated labouring in the hot season. He endured the wind and the rain, and cared for the crops and the fields in the hope that his family would enjoy the fruits of his labours. But then the Yavana struck, his crops were destroyed and his trade ruined. If this went on, Dadoji said, not even the name of the Hindus will remain.[43] Then, in a passage which

40 ibid., p. 16. 41 ibid., p. 17. 42 ibid., p. 21. 43 ibid., pp. 21–2.

could hardly help but point to the presence of the British power, Dadoji inveighed against the imposition of foreign power:

> Why should we support them, whose name and country are unknown to us?
> Why should they rule over us, uninvited?
> Tear up their power by the roots and drive them out
> Make it as though this suffering had never existed.[44]

In his most explicit attempt to assimilate Shivaji to the tradition of the great heroes of classical Hindu literature, Joshi describes Shivaji as another incarnation of Vishnu. Having lamented the passivity of the people, Dadoji urged Shivaji to take up the leadership:

> Take up the command yourself, Oh King, become their leader
> Take up your spear and drive them out
> Whenever some difficulty has come upon this land, the merciful Lord
> Has always devised some remedy and come to our rescue
>
> When the country was overrun by many demons, then quickly the Lord
> Took incarnation in the Raghav family and destroyed them all
> Like the demons, the foreign unbelievers have now spread over the country
> It seems to me, Oh King, that the Lord has planned you to kill them
> When the Daityas overran the iand the Lord
> Took incarnation as Narasinha, destroyed their pride and killed them.
> So the Lord has taken on the form of you, and like the Daityas
> Now uproots these foreign unbelievers and destroys them.[45]

Again, it is possible to see the conventional literary tradition for which Phule has attempted to provide an alternative. Narasinha, whom Phule had depicted as an enemy of the *Shudras*, here appears as the incarnation of Vishnu, the Daityas as the enemies of the gods.

In the final passage, one can see the way in which this identification with the literature of all-India Hinduism was connected with the political worldview of a Brahman like Joshi, an early nationalist with a western education, and a history of involvement in his local student *sabha*. Here, the connection between the religious conservatism of such a worldview, and its ability to assimilate new forms of political activity, helps to explain Phule's sense of the threat that this combination of old

44 ibid., p. 25. 45 ibid., p. 27.

and new forms of social power posed for the future of the lower castes. Dadoji encouraged Shivaji to gather conferences of the people, hold meetings and discussions with them, and convince them of the need for collective action. It does not seem to me too far-fetched to see, in the language of Dadoji's advice, the political idiom of early moderate nationalist ideology, with its emphasis on the leadership and education of the larger masses of Hindu society into a greater political consciousness:

> You should go to every village, town and city
> Wander day and night, gather all the people there together
> Hold great conferences, and all this sorrow, this great disaster
> This hatred, this greed, this torment, this cruelty
>
> All these great difficulties; hold discussions about them
> Give lectures, make the ordinary people understand
> Young and old should know that we are much hindered
> Make them understand that we need some way out of this disaster.
> Fill the hearts of all with patriotism
> Bring everyone into battle to fight for the freedom of their country,
> Bring out the mavalis, like bulls in their strength
> Then take the brave deshis foremost in strength and courage.
>
> You should rouse up the palegars, prepare the sansthaniks,
> The desais, the brave deshmukhs, the deshpandes,
> The killedars, the naiks, the invincible keepers of forts,
> Direct them all and create a mighty and fearless assembly.[46]

This might well be compared with the emphasis which M. G. Ranade placed upon the orderly and structured exercise of power in the Maratha state: the deliberation in councils and assemblies between Shivaji and his Brahman advisers, the consultations between Shivaji and the lesser Maratha chiefs, the involvement of the masses of the people.[47] Although the two writers would not, perhaps, have agreed about what was most worth defending within the Hindu religious tradition – in this respect Ranade was possibly closer to Bhagavat in perceiving an integrated political and religious culture in Maharashtra – there was the same spectrum of interlinked concerns, and the assumption of the same position in relation to the old and new cultural forces that were dominant in shaping society and religion. Both took up the

46 ibid., p. 29.
47 M. G. Ranade, *Rise of the Maratha Power*, September 1974, pp. 52–64, reprinted edition in the series 'Classics of Indian History and Economics', Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

cause of some aspect of popular or conventional Hindu religiosity; both were sympathetic to the idea of national unity and concerned to produce a viable ideology for the integration of the masses of the people into a unitary political and religious identity. As Brahmans, both belonged to a social group traditionally the guardians and interpreters of one of the dominant cultural forces at work in Indian society – conventional Hinduism. What is perhaps less obvious, and well illustrated in this example, is that it was this mediating position that provided the paradigm for the new role of such high caste groups as the mediators between some of the new political and administrative structures associated with British rule, and the larger masses in western Indian society governed by these structures. It was for this model that Phule's Shivaji ballad attempted to create an alternative. It assimilated this central episode of Maharashtra's history to the much longer tradition of social leadership by the Maratha-*kunbi* caste grouping. In this grouping were united the two activities that had shaped and informed the development of Maharashtra's culture: the physical labour of cultivating the soil and providing for the support of the rest of society, and the tradition of the warrior and protector of the land and those that lived on it. These traditions were symbolised in the figures of King Bali and Shivaji. In this way, Phule hoped to provide for a potential following a tradition of social leadership with its own distinctive style and purpose that would stand as an ideological rival to what he saw as Brahman-centred interpretations of culture and models of social leadership.

PART 5

The lower caste community in contemporary society

11
Religious emancipation and political competition

The performance of any religious ceremony by a Brahman priest for a member of another caste expresses in a concrete form the relations of purity between them which make up the basis for Hindu religious hierarchy. It is the Brahman priest alone who, in his ritual purity, has the power to mediate between the human world and that of the high gods, and so who controls the entry of divine power into the world.[1] Ritual not only represents the broader relationship between Brahmans and others, but actively affects relationships within communities themselves. It is in ritual that the divine power is invoked to sanction the acts of individuals, such as marriage, which become thereby a part of the public structure of the community and contribute to its unified moral life.

For both of these reasons, Phule felt that the employment of Brahman priests negated the very principle upon which he hoped a community of the lower castes would be based. In the two chapters that follow this one, we will be looking at the arguments that he put forward to persuade his audiences of the downright moral evils of existing practices, and of the need for them to perform their own ceremonies if they wished to restore some purity to their religion.

This desire for independence in religion formed one of the main impulses behind the formation of the Satyashodhak Samaj, or 'Truth-Seeking Society' set up by Phule and other radicals in 1873. This decision was also a product of their growing realisation of the importance of organisation in the attempt to influence British government policy, and particularly of organisations which could claim to represent more than just the interests of their immediate members. Throughout the 1860s, there had been sporadic attempts to form such groups in Bombay and Pune. The Sarvajanik Sabha, founded in Pune in 1870, was the first of these public associations to take a more permanent root and to build up a membership broader than the educated elites in urban

1 For a discussion of this relation in popular Hinduism, see Lawrence A. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India*, Columbia University Press, New York and London 1975, pp. 31–67.

centres.[2] We will look here briefly at the range of its activities, as an institution which was to be regarded by non-Brahman leaders as an important ideological rival. It originated in an attempt to check the mismanagement of the Paravati temple in Pune, then administered by a self-perpetuating committee with funds supplied by the Bombay government. Ganesh Vasudev Joshi, a well-known pleader in Pune, led the attempts at reform. He and his colleagues felt that the government would be far more likely to respond to their demands for change if they could show that these came from the people of the city as a whole. The Pune Sarvajanik Sabha, with 95 members at its foundation, claimed to represent some 6,000 inhabitants of Pune. Members decided that they should direct their attention not only to the reform of temple management, but to other issues of broad public concern. Indeed, they hoped that the Sabha might become the main channel of communication between the government and the people. The preamble to its constitution stated:

> Whereas it has been deemed expedient that there should exist, between Government and the people, something in the shape of a mediating body which may afford the latter facilities for knowing the intentions and objects of Government as well as adequate means for recovering their rights, by making a true representation of the real circumstances in which they are placed; for these objects an association has been formed.[3]

Its conditions of membership were a unique feature. Each member was required to hold a *mukhtiaranama* or letter of representation, signed by 50 men from Pune and its environs, who appointed the member to act as their spokesman in meetings and decisions of the Sabha. By 1871, there were 141 members, representing some 17,000 inhabitants. The membership included a strong elite element, with first class sardars, landowners, merchants, and educated men, from government administrators to teachers and pleaders, well represented in its ranks. Brahmans formed the most numerous of the castes represented, both in the general body of the Sabha and on its managing committee.

In July 1872, the Sabha submitted a memorial to the Governor of Bombay, which suggested that the Governor's Legislative Council should be made more representative of the Presidency as a whole,

2 This brief account of the Pune Sarvajanik Sabha is taken from J. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 95–101, and S. R. Mehrotra, 'The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha: The Early Phase (1870–1880)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1969.

3 *The Constitution of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and its rules*, Pune 1871, p. 8, quoted in J. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism*, p. 96.

instead of its existing allocation of four men to represent Bombay city, and only one for the very much larger hinterland. The memorial also asked that government should appoint some members by reason of their superior education.

The Sabha also took the lead in organising a *svadeshi* movement in the Deccan, setting up shops and co-operatives to encourage the sale of Indian goods, and encouraging members not to use goods manufactured abroad where the same item was made at home. Joshi and his colleagues also turned their attention to agrarian affairs. In 1872, they established a sub-committee to investigate the condition of the agricultural communities in the Deccan. The committee travelled widely, gathering information on prices, wages, indebtedness, land revenue, and the operation of the forest laws. In the following year, the Sabha joined forces with the Bombay Association to send the prominent Bombay Parsi Naoroji Furdunji to London, to present this evidence before the Third Parliamentary Committee on Indian Finance. In 1875, the Sabha sent a petition to the House of Commons demanding that India should be represented in parliament directly, and complaining of the indifference to Indian affairs in London. At the same time, Joshi worked to establish a network of local branches in the Deccan, which both took up local grievances, and provided support and information for the initiatives of the Pune Sabha. In July 1878, it launched its *Quarterly Journal*, which published its proceedings, and many other articles on important public issues.

The members of the Sabha were not misplaced in their assumption that their opinions and decisions would carry weight with the Bombay government. The latter exercised a close surveillence on the Sabha, and in 1878 the Governor, Richard Temple, arranged for the transfer of Mahadev Govind Ranade, then employed as a judge in Pune, and a great influence on the Sabha, to the town of Nasik. *The Englishman* expressed this sense of threat to established principles of government in an article on the Sabha: 'It is well to realise that we are not yet prepared to govern India by means of popular representation, and that anything which approaches to be a *bona fide* representative body will necessarily exercise a power incompatible with the existing system of administration.'[4]

By the mid-1870s, the leaders of Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj had become sharply aware of the power of the Sarvajanik Sabha, and conscious that it embodied a view of Indian society, of its proper social leadership, and of the future of Indian political institutions, that

4 *The Englishman*, 18 May 1875, quoted in S. R. Mehrotra, 'The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha', p. 309.

diverged sharply from their own. In the final part of this book, we will see how non-Brahmans of many different shades of opinion united in their opposition, both to the Sabha and to its greater successor on the all-India level, the Indian National Congress.

12

Social protest and the construction of a religious ethic

The idea of human rights

Compared with the ideas that had developed within the European Christian tradition, none of the theologies of pre-nineteenth-century Hinduism contained a strong concept of an original human equality. In Christian thought, both catholic and protestant, this equality was a reflection of all men's origins at the hands of their Maker. This absence of any idea of a 'natural' order amongst men, in contrast with the humanly contrived order of society, meant that the speculative traditions of Hindu philosophy did not produce a movement of 'rationalist' social criticism. Such a movement did develop within the intellectual traditions of Europe from the seventeenth century. Central to it was the notion of 'human rights', based on the abstract idea of natural law.[1]

Moreover, the tendency to devalue this-worldly life, together with the karmic doctrine that the structure of present society represented the final realisation of religious justice, had a profound effect on the Hindu individual's attitude to his own society. He could not look upon it as an arena for the realisation of social values, such as human equality, whose source was an extra-worldly God. The individual's activity should, rather, take the form of a search for release from all worldly existence.

Phule set out ways in which these attitudes and values might be superseded. The uncompromising claim of a pre-social human equality, deriving from the purposes of an extra-worldly Creator, stood at the centre of his scheme. This opened the way for a concept of natural human rights as an ethic not only valid for all societies but positively enjoined upon them as one of the most important goals both for the individual and for society. In developing these ideas, Phule drew heavily upon the work of Thomas Paine, whose work was very popular in the radical circles in which Phule moved. He thus built indirectly on the much longer European tradition of natural rights thought, of which Paine's own work was a part.

Before looking at Phule's debt to Paine, it will be useful to examine

1 For these generalisations, I have drawn on Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, The Free Press, New York 1958, pp. 143–5.

first the kinds of terms that he used to describe the divine being, to suggest his relations with the created world, and to distinguish him from notions of a Hindu father-god. In the Marathi introduction of the work *Slavery*, he referred to God as 'the all-powerful Parameshvara who rules the whole world and who sees all'.[2] He finished the introduction with a prayer to the *jaganiyanta*, 'the ordainer and disposer of the world' that the British government should root out the Brahman element in its rule and free the *Shudras* from mental slavery.[3]

Notions of a father-god can, of course, be found in different parts of the Hindu tradition: the idea of a prime mover, a deity who was before all worlds, and who exists as the ultimate godhead behind the profusion of his local and particular manifestations. Weber, indeed, described how 'below the circles of philosophically-schooled Brahmanical intellectuals, in fact in their very midst, there always reappeared in some form a supreme, personal-creator God over and above the crowd of local and functional deities – the *ekantika dharma* – (we would say "monotheism").'[4] Varieties of such monotheism had always existed: while very early ideas of the creator of the world as a personal god, *prajapati*, were replaced by the principle of an impersonal Brahman, this principle itself came to be identified with a personal, extra-worldly god, Brahma. Significantly, Weber ascribed this persistence of monotheistic ideas, alongside the more esoteric varieties of philosophical thought, to a priestly concession to lay needs. In strictly logical terms, the idea of a supreme personal deity was completely at odds with a belief in *karma*.[5] Phule was, however, at pains to distinguish his own ideas from these notions of a father-god. He identified God as the origin of all moral law, and saw nature as the source of man's knowledge, both of God and his laws. His arguments here recall the missionary ideas outlined in chapter 3, and the deist or religious radical devaluation of the institutions of established religion in favour of forms of worship and ideas of duty prompted by man's natural reason. In the English introduction to *Slavery*, Phule protested against the conventional Hindu descriptions of the supreme god:

> Innumerable Bhut writers, with the self-same objects as those of Menu and others of his class, added from time to time to the existing mass of legends, the idle phantasies of their own brains, and palmed them off upon the ignorant masses as of divine inspiration, or as the acts of the Deity himself. The most

2 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, D. Keer and S. G. Malshe (eds.), pp. 83 and 85. The word *Parameshvara* means 'the greatest God' and is derived from two terms, *parama*, 'the greatest' and *ishvara*, a general term for God.

3 ibid., p. 92.

4 Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, p. 168.

5 ibid., p. 173.

immoral, inhuman, unjust actions and deeds have been attributed to that Being who is our Creator, Governor and Protector, and who is all Holiness himself.[6]

He criticised especially the identification of the god Vishnu, and his incarnation in Parashuram, with the supreme god:

It is very surprising that today the Brahmans have induced the Shudras and ati-Shudras to regard Parashuram, the main leader of the Brahmans, as the all-powerful Parameshvara, the Creator of all the world, when he murdered thousands of the Kshatriya people, and cast their women and children down into the most pitiable condition.[7]

In chapter 3, we saw the influence of the work of Thomas Paine and other European deists and religious radicals on Phule and his friends. Their work also helped in developing Phule's argument that all men possessed certain natural and inalienable rights. Their realisation in the social order was one of the first duties of a just society. These rights would always exist as a moral imperative, no matter how much they were neglected or trampled upon in practice. Paine's own work was the clear product of two distinct traditions in European thought.[8] The first focused on the idea of natural rights, and developed as a part of the intellectual background of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. These ideas were given an early systematic expression in John Locke's *Reflections on Civil Government.*[9] The French Revolution in 1789 forced a re-examination in England of many of the radical political ideas that had almost become a part of the currency of everyday political discussion. In the three decades before the Revolution, the abstract idea of inalienable political rights for men, which included that to be governed by elected assemblies, had formed an important part of the intellectual

6 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 77.

7 ibid., p. 89.

8 For an account of the formation of Thomas Paine's ideas, see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, Oxford University Press 1976, pp. 1–17; R. R. Fennessy, o.f.m. *Burke, Paine and the 'Rights of Man'*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1963, pp. 12–36, and Henry Collins (ed.), *Thomas Paine, 'Rights of Man'*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1977, pp. 9–47. A very good discussion of the English radical tradition to which Paine belonged is in A. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: the English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution*, Hutchinson, London 1979, especially pp. 32–64 for the English radical tradition in the eighteenth century, and pp. 171–207 for Paine and English politics in the early 1790s.

9 For the development of natural rights ideas in England, see Paul E. Sigmund, *Natural Law in Political Thought*, Winthrop Publishers, Cambridge Mass. 1971, especially pp. 74–90 on the ideas of Richard Hooker, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke, and pp. 119–33 for the question of ideas of natural law in Edmund Burke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. See also Lester G. Crocker, *Nature and Culture: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment,* The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1963, pp. 1–74, for a good discussion of the intellectual background to natural rights ideas, and the theories of natural law that were current in eighteenth-century France.

climate of eighteenth-century politics.[10] The second tradition upon which Paine's work drew was that of the English Dissenters. Their criticism of the established Anglican Church was linked to a suspicion of hereditary political authority and a disassociation from established social hierarchies.[11] Paine's father was a Quaker, and Quaker values strongly influenced Paine's thought. These values included the idea that all men were equal, since all were the children of one God, the rejection of religious intermediaries between man and his Creator, and the assertion that man needed only his reason and conscience for his spiritual guidance.[12] These traditions combined to produce the arguments of his work *Common Sense*, published during his stay in America in 1776: the idea of natural rights, the demand for representative government, and for the right of resistance to authority imposed without consent.[13] Like many other eighteenth-century radicals, Paine also found the assumptions of Newtonian science particularly attractive, especially the idea that man should use his reason to understand the laws by which the universe was governed. By carrying these assumptions over into the study of society, Paine and many other radicals hoped that it might be possible to create a science for the understanding of society, by which all traditional and inherited institutions might be subjected to the scrutiny of man's reason. Paine himself bought a set of scientific instruments, and attended meetings addressed by two popular lecturers, Benjamin Martin and James Ferguson, who lectured in different parts of the country to audiences of religious dissenters, the self-educated, petty artisans, and shopkeepers, among whom political radicalism and deism found many supporters.[14] Paine was also influenced by the work of the dissenting clergyman and scientist, Joseph Priestley, whose *Essay on the First Principles of Government* was published in 1771.[15]

10 Good accounts of radical political ideas, and the more general intellectual climate of English politics in the latter half of the eighteenth century, are in H. T. Dickenson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain*, Methuen, London 1977, especially pp. 195–269 for the development of radical ideologies and popular radicalism in the 1790s; also John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III*, Cambridge University Press 1976, especially pp. 163–200 for a discussion of the popular movements led by John Wilkes.

11 For a discussion of dissent and political radicalism in eighteenth-century England, see Russell E. Richey, 'The Origins of British Radicalism: The Changing Rationale for Dissent', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, Winter 1973–4, pp. 179–92.

12 See Henry Collins, (ed.), *Thomas Paine, 'Rights of Man'*, pp. 11–12.

13 For Thomas Paine's American experience, and the success of his pamphlet *Common Sense*, published in 1776, which had an enormous impact on the development of American republican opinion, see ibid., pp. 16–19.

14 ibid., pp. 6–7.

15 For an account of Joseph Priestley's career and ideas, with much background information on the interaction between religious dissent, political radicalism, and

The distinction between natural and civil rights, the former of which come from man's Maker, and may not be supplanted by any humanly created authority, even of the greatest antiquity, formed the most important part of Phule's intellectual debt to Paine. Paine set this argument out clearly in the course of rejecting Edmund Burke's criticism of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, published by the French National Assembly in August 1789, and of Burke's more general assertion of the inherent wisdom of human tradition as against institutions and governments created by a deliberate human act.[16] Paine rejected Burke's argument of the respect due to tradition:

If any generation of men ever possessed the right of dictating the mode by which the world should be governed for ever, it was the first generation that existed; and if that generation did it not, no succeeding generation can show any authority for doing it, nor can any set it up. The illuminating and divine principle of the equal rights of man (for it has its origin from the Maker of man) relates, not only to succeeding individuals, but to generations of men succeeding each other. Every generation is equal in rights to the generations which preceded it, by the same rule that every individual is born equal in rights with his contemporaries.[17]

Throughout his work *Slavery*, Phule stressed that conventional Hindu religion was indefensible above all because of its violation of man's rights. In the Marathi introduction to the work, he compared the real intentions of the Creator with the fictions of Brahman literature: 'God has given to the Shudras, ati-Shudras and other people the freedom to enjoy equally all the things of the earth which he created. But the Brahmans made up false books in his name, and trampled upon the rights of all other men, giving advantage only to themselves.'[18] He emphasised the importance of mental independence, without which man's sense of his proper rights may be lost: 'The great God who rules the world, and who sees everything, has given to every human being the same rights everywhere, but cunning people whose only concern is their own advantage may cause them to be hidden.'[19]

However, Phule associated this idea of human rights as much with Christian missionary efforts as with the work of European religious radicals. The lack of any sense of paradox in his simultaneous

popular science, see F. W. Gibbs, *Joseph Priestley, Adventurer in Science and Champion of Truth*, Nelson, London 1965.

16 A good discussion of the debate between Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke is in R. R. Fennessy, *Burke, Paine and the 'Rights of Man'*, especially pp. 168–76 for Thomas Paine's natural rights theories, and pp. 213–50 for Thomas Paine's English influence in the popular radicalism of the 1790s.

17 Henry Collins (ed.), *Thomas Paine, 'Rights of Man'*, p. 88.

18 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 84.

19 ibid., p. 85.

admiration of both is another reminder of the peculiar interaction between them that helped shape the religious and political radicalism of Phule and his friends. In one of the rare references to the immediate origins of his own religious position he explained:

> From the time that the English rulers came into this country, many European and American men of truth could not bear to see our sufferings; so they came constantly to see us in our place of imprisonment, and gave us this advice, that you are human beings just like we are, the source of your creation and nurture is one with ours, and you, like us, are worthy of all forms of rights, so why do you defer to the contrived authority of these Brahmans? From all sorts of truthful suggestions such as these, I eventually understood my own true rights, and at once I kicked open the door of the fortress prison contrived by Brahma, and escaped outside, and then began to give my worship to our Creator.[20]

There are other areas of Paine's work, especially in *Rights of Man*, which may have helped to shape Phule's thought, or to which at least it shows strong parallels. The most striking of these is Paine's determined adoption of that stock argument of English radicals since the seventeenth century: the idea of the Norman Yoke. We saw at the end of chapter 8 how ideas of an ancient usurpation of power and land occur in a very wide variety of cultural and historical settings. Paine's description of the origins of monarchy drew directly on English radicals' version of this argument:

> It could have been no difficult thing in the early and solitary ages of the world, while the chief employment of men was that of attending flocks and herds, for a banditti of ruffians to overrun a country and lay it under contributions. Their power thus being established, the chief of the band contrived to lose the name of Robber in that of Monarch; and hence the origin of Monarchy and Kings.[21]

Paine's description of governments of priestcraft, as one of the most familiar ways in which men through the ages have been deprived of their proper rights, bears a remarkable similarity to Phule's characterisation of the rule of Brahmans in India. Paine described his government of priests:

> When a set of artful men pretended, through the medium of Oracles, to hold intercourse with the Deity, as familiarly as they now march up the back-stairs in European Courts, the world was completely under the government of superstition. The Oracles were consulted, and whatever they were made to say became the law.[22]

Paine's intense admiration for America and, at the time of writing *Rights of Man*, for France, may have contributed to Phule's sense of them as societies where human rights were particularly valued, and to

20 ibid., p. 145.
21 Henry Collins (ed.), *Thomas Paine, 'Rights of Man'*, p. 190.
22 ibid., pp. 91–2.

his admiration of leaders such as George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette.

Broader parallels can, indeed, be drawn between the style of the polemic adopted by the two men. Paine's work was less important for its originality as for its clear synthesis and vigorous statement of radical ideas, already in circulation, to new popular audiences. The hostility that Paine's work aroused in England was not simply a product of the novelty or originality of his ideas. Many of these had been the stock-in-trade of political and social theorists for much of the eighteenth century. What Paine did was to present a clear and simple synthesis of these ideas, and to circulate them directly to groups of radical working men. Much the same could be said about Phule's work in the realm of human rights theory. His achievement was less to present original arguments as to draw up a bold composition of existing ideas, and to carry it to popular groups at the lower levels of western Indian society who had little previous experience of such political and religious speculation.

This clear affinity between the work of the two men may even be traced to some common elements in their respective situations. Both came from families where individual skill and enterprise had brought some degree of independence and comfort. Paine's father was a successful craftsman stay-maker,[23] and Phule's a shopkeeper. Neither had received a conventional education. Both had used their own resources and skills to making a living and a reputation for themselves in the criticism of established social and religious hierarchies that seemed to embody only the interests of the powerful.

Worldly life and the common man

With his conviction that the purpose of social and religious institutions was to help realise abstract human rights, Phule maintained a strong concern with the social environment in which the common man lived his everyday life. His social life was the sphere in which the individual was able to externalise himself, to constitute his life in the full enjoyment of the social and religious rights bestowed on him by his Maker. Worldly existence could not be seen as illusory, or too transitory to be important. This argument was merely a Brahman device to draw attention away from the ruination of the lower castes. In his collection of ballads, *Priestcraft Exposed*, a series of vignettes of ordinary Hindu family life, Phule contrasted two quite different views of the meaning and value of the commonest of human experiences. In

23 ibid., pp. 11–12.

one ballad, he described the crisis in a family of *Shudras* when the master of the house lay dying, and the Brahman priest is summoned to perform his last rites. The priest attaches no value to the *Shudra*'s life: it is insignificant, like all human existence, and death comes as a welcome relief. He has no feeling for the real anguish in the family, regarding the man's death merely as another stage in the journey of the soul. The family, on the other hand, endow these landmarks of human experience with enormous significance. It is the particular individual that the family values, rather than the idea of a transcendent scheme of incarnations. It is clear that the latter idea, energetically advanced by the priest, serves only to give them a feeling of dislocation and bewilderment. Phule describes ironically how the ailing *Shudra* is too much attached to his family and worldly life:

> He tosses and turns in pain; he tries to think
> His mind delights in his worldly existence
> See how he has sunk in the illusions of worldly life.[24]

He describes the *Shudra*'s very human fear of illness and death, but even these most central experiences are, as it were, appropriated and distorted by the Brahman, who maximises his opportunity for gain. Phule describes the grief of the women of the family:

> Their minds filled with anguish, they look on passionately
> Inspect the husband closely
> As if the sky had fallen on them
>
> They get up hastily and go to the children
> Pick them up and take them on the hip
> Hurriedly give them milk to drink
>
> Leave them abruptly, go back again
> Meanwhile, the Brahman has fallen across their path
> He silences the women.[25]

The Brahman's religious worldview and his personal avarice unite to shake the faith of the family. Phule makes it clear that they are neither convinced by the Brahman's interpretation, nor able to place the event in any other scheme save that provided by their feeling of the value of all human life and activity. The Brahman's exhortations are hence presented with great bitterness and irony:

> Why don't you give a gift and so let him die in
> peace of mind
> The cruelty of his worldly existence is over
> God's invitation has come.[26]

24 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 59.
25 ibid. 26 ibid., p. 60.

Phule points out the hollowness of the priest's position:

> Enough now of this false tenderness
> He applies himself now to whispering the puranas
> In vain this life is wasted
>
> The indifference of the twice-born: no proper arrangements are made
> See, many have gone thus to ruin
> Harassed even at the door of death.[27]

The man's funeral expenses cause the family to mortgage his fields to the Brahman, who eventually claims them as his own; the women are forced to take work as labourers, and end their lives in destitution.

Again, in his ballad about Shivaji, Phule makes clear the value he attaches to the worldly concerns and struggles of the individual. Shivaji reproaches his brother, Venkaji, for having withdrawn from the world and his princely duties and become a wandering ascetic, and the criticism is made of Hinduism's apparent tendency to world renunciation:

> Calling yourself the son of a hero, how have you become a gosavi?
> Has the diamond feared the test?
> How has the imprint of our father been wiped away so quickly?
>
> My young brother, the beloved help at my back
> Why have you become angry with me?
> Accept my advice, come to the defence of my people
> Give up this villainous hypocrisy.[28]

The realisation of man's proper rights in society clearly depended a good deal on the conduct of each man to the next. The model for human relations was provided by God's relation to his human creatures. This resembled the relation of a father to his children. The family therefore formed the model for human society, whose internal relations should be those of brothers and sisters, without difference of rank or status. This is, of course, the paradigm for the actual community of the oppressed *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras*. At the end of his work *Slavery*, Phule gives in full a public announcement which he has made in the shape of a letter to the *Dnyanodaya* newspaper early in 1873. In it, he declared that he would treat as a brother anyone who accepted and practised the principle of a basic religious equality before God:

> Disregarding all the important books of the Brahmans which are used to support essays saying that we are their slaves, and all books connected with

27 ibid.

28 Jotirao Phule, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 36. *Gosavi* is a term for a wandering ascetic.

them, I undertake to consider as my younger brother before our Creator, and to act accordingly, the authors of books written to support the equal claims of all, whatever country or religion they may be from.

Secondly, I will not bring into disrepute the right of the pure authority given by our Creator by tolerating those who consider anyone else to be despised through the arrogance of their distorted convictions.

Thirdly, if I am convinced that any dasa (kshudra) has determined to worship only our Creator, and decided to pursue a clean trade, and is acting in accordance with this, then I will consider him as a very brother in my family and will share food with him, from whichever country he may be.[29]

The paradigm for the community of the oppressed is therefore an image of universal brotherhood amongst all those who believe in an original human equality. This brotherhood transcends all ties of social rank, language, or religion. Here, Phule felt himself to be closer to sympathetic foreigners than to conventional Brahmans.

True and false patriotism

Phule made it clear that the image of universal brotherhood was the criterion not only for the lower caste community, but applied to society as a whole, and could be used to assess the larger political projects put forward by different groups. He held this up as the standard by which contemporary expressions of patriotism were to to be judged. In chapter 5, we saw how Phule first encountered Thomas Paine's work, encouraged, as he said, by a few learned and 'progressive' Brahmans. They hoped to persuade their audience of young radicals in Pune that their conquest by the British had been the result of social and political weakness caused by the corruption of the true religion of the Hindus in practices such as rigid caste divisions. The remedy for this weakness was for all castes to unite and return to the ancient purity of the Hindu religion, for without this the Hindus would never have the strength to drive the foreigners from their land.[30] Phule was scathing in his criticism of this variety of patriotism, seeing in it only a cloak for Brahman attempts to preserve traditional religious hierarchies from the reforming and radical influences that had accompanied British rule. He clearly regarded rule by the British as less of a violation of man's natural rights than the religious hierarchies that he associated with conventional Hinduism. The unity which the Brahmans had urged was not worth the price of a less than human status and existence for those at the

29 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 144–5. The Marathi term *dasa* means a 'servant' or 'slave'. The term *kshudra* means 'low' or 'insignificant'.
30 see p.111, and ibid., p. 135.

bottom of the hierarchies of orthodox Hinduism: 'If the ancestors of these progressive and learned men had really understood the meaning of patriotism, they would not have written essays in their books in which their own countrymen, the Shudras, were regarded as lower than animals.'[31]

Human history and the struggle against oppression

A fundamental difference between the 'historical' religions, Christianity and Islam, and Hinduism, consists in their attitudes to history. While the latter conceives of human history as the eternal recurrence of illusion, the historical religion works out its destiny within those very processes, organised around the Church, the visible body of the faithful, the Book and the incarnated Saviour. All human history takes its meaning from the struggle.[32] As we have seen, one of Phule's main concerns was to locate the struggle of the lower castes within history, to transform myth into history and establish a diachronic relation between present and past oppression. King Bali had stood as the symbol and mainstay of the pre-Aryan realm. Phule also employed the figure of Bali in another way that strongly recalled the Christian vision of a returning Saviour, and its perception of all human history as the working out of a great contest between good and evil. From the original figure of King Bali, Phule constructed a whole tradition of heroes, men who have taken the part of the weak and downtrodden against their oppressors. The connection with Christian eschatology did not lie merely in a structural similarity, since Christ himself was identified as a latter-day King Bali. There was in Phule's thought a sense of the movement of all human history towards the realisation of God's kingdom on earth, although this is not the Christian God. He incorporated the Christian scheme within his own worldview by the assimilation of Christ to a larger tradition of 'King Bali' figures. In the tenth section of his work *Slavery*, under the title 'Other King Balis', he described the figure of Christ, although he did not name him specifically:

When a King Bali came into this world who was the champion of the poor, full of purity and speaking with his knowledge of the truth, he fixed firmly in his mind the intentions of the Creator and Lord of us all, and in order that all

31 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 135–6.

32 Again, I have drawn on Max Weber here, in his argument that the idea of *karma* makes impossible a religious eschatology of the world: instead, human history becomes 'an eternal, meaningless "wheel" of recurrent births and deaths rolling on through all eternity. Only two non-temporal realities are discoverable in it: the eternal order itself and those beings, who, through escape of on-going rebirths, must be conceived as their subjects.' Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, p. 167.

should have an equal enjoyment of the pure knowledge full of truth, and the rights which he has given to us all, he began to set free his poor, weak and ignorant brothers from the slavery of priests, deceitful, evil and cunning like the Brahman priests, and to establish God's kingdom upon earth; and in doing this, it seems to me that he fulfilled a prophecy made to his mother.[33]

The reference to Christ then grew more explicit, and Phule drew on Thomas Paine as the example of the effects of the Christian tradition in the social sphere:

When the ancestors of great learned men like Thomas Paine became the followers of this King Bali, all their previous troubles and sufferings vanished and they became happy. And after a few evil men had put that King Bali on to the cross, a great movement began throughout Europe and thousands of people became his disciples, and laboured night and day as our Creator ordered, to establish his kingdom on earth.[34]

The Buddha had belonged to the same tradition in his struggle against the vices of Brahmanic Hinduism. His efforts had in turn provoked a Brahman reaction in the campaign by the Shankaracharaya to reassert the values of orthodox Hinduism:

He could not bear to see how the evil deeds of the Brahman caste were everywhere in disgrace, and how the religion of the Buddha was spreading everywhere. Because the behaviour of his people was no longer acceptable, he put a prohibition on the eating of beef and the drinking of alcohol, for which vices the Buddhist people had despised and ostracised the Vedas and all their books. He made changes in these, and in order to give them new strength he set up a new atheistic belief, which is today called the Vedanta, or the path of knowledge.[35]

At last this period of oppression had been brought to an end by the Christian missionaries who followed the armies of the East India Company:

The disciples of that King Bali, the Scottish and American missionaries, came to this country without caring for the opinions of their own governments, and presenting to the treacherous Brahmans the authority of their true doctrines, they freed many Shudras from their snares, and broke the bonds of slavery around their necks.[36]

Phule identified the same struggle between the poor and weak and their oppressors in the history of other countries. This was done in the context of the discussion about the real nature of patriotism and the sense of community that it engenders. The conversion of a country to Christianity always resulted, Phule argued, in a great strengthening of this

33 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 121.

34 ibid., p. 122. Again, the incongruity of Phule's association of Thomas Paine with the Christian tradition is striking.

35 ibid. 36 ibid., p. 123.

fellow-feeling, and he took as the greatest example of patriotism those who have been most concerned with the freedom and rights of their fellow countrymen:

> Before the coming of that King Bali, the English had learned their patriotism in the school of the Greeks; but when they became his disciples, that virtue grew amongst them so much that no people of another religion could compare with them. If you wanted to, you could also take the example of the American disciple of King Bali, George Washington; or if you did not want to use that one, then you could take the example of the French disciple of King Bali, Lafayette, and no one could contradict you.[37]

Here, it is possible to see how Phule's perception of human history strengthened his scheme more generally. On the mass level, history became purposive. Behind its surface movements could be discerned a more significant and perennial struggle between oppressive social and religious power, which would deprive man of his inborn rights and liberties, and the champions of the weak and of the common man against such power. Thus, for the lower castes, their struggle no longer appeared as a local and transitory one, yet another example of the chaos and strife of human affairs, in which nothing real or permanent was to be found. Rather, their efforts provided the very dynamism of India's historical development since ancient times.

Phule's use of the figure of King Bali recalls another aspect of the widespread belief in rights which have been lost at some ancient time, which may yet be recovered. This is the tradition of the Sleeping Hero, the great leader who has not really died, but will come back one day to restore to his people the power or the land of which they have been deprived. As Christopher Hill has described, belief in such a hero was often associated with defeat at the hands of foreign conquerors. Such beliefs attached to numerous heroes who had died resisting foreign invaders: King Arthur had not died fighting the Anglo-Saxons, but was sleeping at Avalon; King Harold had not been killed in the Battle of Hastings, but would return to fight against the Normans. James IV had not in fact perished at the Battle of Flodden, and would return to lead the Scots.[38] Likewise King Bali, the champion of the lower castes, had returned, in a variety of guises, and would one day come to restore his people to their kingdom.

37 ibid., p. 135.
38 Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, Mercury Books, London 1962, pp. 55–6.

13

Traditional privileges and new skills: Phule's analysis of the nature of Brahman power

Introduction

The basic elements of Phule's analysis of Brahman power had changed[1] little during the decade and a half that followed the writing of *The Third Eye*. While the argument of the corruption of Brahman officials in the British administration was a relatively easy one to convey to a popular audience, however, the rejection of the religious authority of Brahman priests was a much more difficult matter. The crucial practical point at which a potential follower would have to make such a rejection came in the performance of the numerous rituals which convention demanded of the pious Hindu. The necessity of a Brahman priest for the performance of any ceremonial act of importance would have appeared to a potential follower as a sacred and unalterable reality of religious life. The very extremism of Phule's anti-Brahman polemic from the late 1860s may be explained in part in the need for a degree of emotional conviction which would match that with which older beliefs had been held. His attempt to evoke this kind of response focused on the portrayal of the figure of 'the Brahman' as a unique assemblage of all imaginable social and moral evils. As in *The Third Eye*, the idea of a tightly controlled conspiracy underlay much of his description. The different areas of Brahman activity – in the religious and economic life of the village, in the new local and provincial political institutions, in the religious reform societies and the social reform movement amongst Brahmans – were but varying manifestations of an essentially unitary force. This force waged a hidden war on these different fronts to maintain the power of Brahmans as against other social groups, and appeared in different guises the better to confuse and mislead its victims.

Yet the polemical technique that Phule employed to suggest the real relationship between areas of Brahman activity that appeared to all intents and purposes unconnected represented a considerable refinement on his earlier emphasis on a deliberate conspiracy. The difficulty with a conscious argument of conspiracy was, of course, that it was difficult to maintain with conviction in all contexts. What might work

very well in the heat of a gathering of followers might carry less conviction in a more sober analysis. Rather than placing the idea of an actual conspiracy at the forefront of his argument, he projected the association of different kinds of Brahman activity to his popular audiences in a much subtler, almost subliminal way. By associating and juxtaposing his description of different kinds of Brahman activity, he managed to import into his argument in an almost pre-conscious way the assumption of some connection between them. At first sight, he appears merely to be shifting his argument about in the most strangely haphazard way. He describes, for example, the nature of India's economic relationship with Britain, and its effects in impoverishing India's craftsmen; then quite unexpectedly asserts that the basic reason for their poverty should be traced back to the prohibition placed upon crossing the Attock river by the Aryan invaders of ancient India, which was intended to prevent the lower castes from learning any skills that might contribute to their advancement. Again, he describes the recent history of Maharashtra, and the oppression of the lower castes under peshwa rule. Then he suddenly conflates the latter with the ancient enemies of the lower castes, declaring that he rejoiced to see the British triumph over the tribe of Parashuram. Most frequently, he takes the argument of an ancient Brahman act of conquest, and telescopes it with the description of the different powers of Brahmans in contemporary society. He describes how the Brahmans had originally condemned the *Shudras* to ignorance and deprived them of their religious rights at the time of the Aryan invasions. In the same breath, he argues that the new political organisations set up to unite the people, and present their views to the British government, represented only a new set of Brahman instruments for the extension of their power and influence over the lower castes, much as the ancient Aryans had declared themselves to be *bhudeva*, gods on earth, before their newly conquered subjects. These apparently fortuitous associations of ideas combined to produce what was, in fact, a highly sophisticated and effective polemical instrument for the interpretation to a popular audience of Maharashtra's history and contemporary society, and the significance of Brahman activities in them. It assumed, throughout, the interconnectedness of all kinds of Brahman power, presenting this as a fact so obvious that it needed no particular argument or demonstration to prove it.

It is perhaps worth noting here that, at this level, Phule's polemic shares much in common with other 'conspiracy' theories of politics, adopted by a wide range of social and religious groups in quite different cultural settings. In common with, for example, the intense anti-catholicism that was such a prominent feature of seventeenth-century

England, or indeed the later anti-communism of the American right, Phule's ideological strategy was to present the enemies of the lower castes, the scattered Brahman communities of western India, as a tightly organised monolith, with an essential unity and common purpose in carrying out its designs.[1] Like these other groups, Phule attributed to his opponents a degree of consistency and shared intent that certainly went far beyond any reality. But the point here is not that Phule misjudged or miscalculated the real extent of Brahman unity. His purpose here was not to offer a detached description of Brahman activities, but to present them in a form that would supply what he felt to be the ideological needs of a popular movement. This is not, however, to argue that Phule regarded this interpretation of Brahman power merely as an instrument to goad a lower caste following into a common opposition. There is always the sense in his writing that even his most lurid portrayals of Brahman conspiracy reflected, in a much distorted form, the basic truth that the different Brahman communities of western India did derive a kind of unity from their common religious loyalties.

Priestcraft Exposed: Brahman power in ritual

Phule's collection of ballads, *Priestcraft Exposed*, attempted to undermine existing belief in the necessity of a Brahman to carry out religious ritual. No such intermediary was necessary between man and God; and where Brahmans did attempt to interpose themselves, this was in search only of money or power, and not of the spiritual well-being of Hindus themselves. From the description of the Aryan invasion in the first ballad of *Priestcraft Exposed*, Phule turned directly to this exploitation of the lower castes in ritual. In four narrative pieces, he traced the dependence of the *kunbi* upon the Brahman priest at every stage of his life. The first piece recalls the story of *The Third Eye*. It described how the Brahman priest goes to the house of the *Shudra* at the birth of his child and terrifies the couple with tales of malevolent planetary influences, so that they ruin themselves in performing propitiatory rites

1 For a discussion of the ideas of a catholic conspiracy in seventeenth-century England, see Carol Z. Wiener, 'The Beleaguered Isle: A Study of Elizabethan and Early Jacobean Anti-Catholicism', *Past and Present*, no. 51, May 1971; and Robin Clifton, 'The Popular Fear of Catholics during the English Revolution', *Past and Present*, no. 52, August 1971. See also Franz Neumann's classic work on the effects of 'conspiracy' theories in reinforcing the unity of the group, providing a focus for its anxieties and fears, and creating a dynamic for it, in its opposition to a supposed enemy: F. L. Neumann, in H. Marcuse (ed.), *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State. Essays in Political and Legal Theory*, The Free Press, New York 1957, especially the chapter 'Anxiety and Politics', pp. 270–300.

and feasting large numbers of Brahmans.[2] The second piece describes 'How the Brahman priest plunders the Shudra at his wedding'. The priest comes to examine the horoscopes of the couple:

At the time of proposal the priest comes
Affecting great airs, he looks at the horoscope

He builds up his hopes of a great reward
He calculates the astrological houses and repeats the name of God

Calculating the marriage, he spreads out his wares
With a Ganpati made of supari nuts

A heap of coconuts as a food offering to the gods
And as custom demands, the payment of a great fee.[3]

Phule describes the noise and confusion of the wedding, the Brahman hurrying carelessly through recitations and calculations incomprehensible to the family, the confusion of the young couple, the quarrels over payment:

The uninvited guests pour in
Their hands spread out for money

The thread is rolled up, a prison for the bride and groom
Gifts of money is the real meaning behind their chants

They burn twigs and make the sacred fire
The mind has no shame and no satisfaction.[4]

Instead, Phule urges that close relatives and friends should arrange the marriages in their families, and do this according to the qualities of the individuals themselves, rather than supposed astrological calculations:

Do not give these things to others to do,
With religion as the reason, being ruined needlessly

The young and old friends of each
Should choose a jury of their own caste

Their age, years, qualities and love
Examine and see these thoroughly

Put a garland of prayers for God
This is an agreement of happiness.[5]

The third piece describes the ceremonies, expenditures and feasting that are necessary for the *Shudra* when his daughter reaches puberty, and the fourth, when the *Shudra* builds a new house. Here, Phule contrasts the labour and sweat of the *Shudras* who build the house with the parasitical living made by the Brahman:

2 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, D. Keer and S. G. Malshe (eds.), p. 50.
3 ibid. 4 ibid. 5 ibid., pp. 51–2.

In the heat of the summer, the labourer digs the foundations
He carries small baskets of plaster

The stonemason climbs up steep hills
Spreads out the bricks in the cold

The carpenter climbs up like a monkey
He dovetails the pieces of wood together

All of them suffer just to fill their stomachs
None of them are afraid to work

Sweat oozes from their bodies and falls in drops
They toil ceaselessly; the heart breaks.[6]

But at the end of the day, it is the Brahman who has come to perform the ceremonies for the new house, who feasts on the delicacies provided by the owner of the house, and not the labourers who have built it:

Let your way of living be consumed in flames
Fresh food before those who have laboured
This is a shameful deed
The intelligent will understand your tricks.[7]

The central experiences of the religious life of the *Shudra*, the very mode of his contact with divine forces through the Brahman priest, could thus bear a very different interpretation. To drive home the point that the mediating role of Brahman priests in religious ritual was only one aspect of a many-faceted power, Phule extended his sphere of analysis in his next ballad. This oscillated between references to history, new perceptions of contemporary religious practices, and appeals to the British government. He pointed first to the enduring ability of Hinduism to command belief and obedience from its followers:

The circle of rshis; the strength of dharma and the power of the Vedas
A great shower of curses
A kick on the chest of God.[8]

He turned to the Aryan invasion, and the subsequent reduction of the *Shudras* to ignorance and servitude:

Cruel soldiers; the weapon of the pen
Made our great heroes into slaves,
Brahma at their head

6 ibid., p. 53. 7 ibid., p. 54.
8 ibid. This is a reference to one of the ancient Hindu sages, Brigu, supposed to have kicked the god Vishnu in the chest, and escaped punishment because he was a Brahman.

Brave in battle, they rush in without a thought
Arrows flying everywhere
The soldiers of Parashuram

Seeing the ignorant Shudras
Slowly reduce them to subjection
Began to read them old religious stories.

Phule then turned to the role of Brahmans as clerks, accountants, and administrators, drawing together both aspects of their power, the religious and the temporal, and showing that they formed part of the same phenomenon. Here he related how the Brahman clerk was able to manipulate illiterate debtors:

They ingratiate themselves, and are made clerks
They polish off all work
The rogues are very clever

They look quickly into the open file
They choose the deeds of debt, copy by copy
In every home they press for payment

They gather in all the money, showing all the details
They impress the master with their intelligence
Bullying and threatening the families.

The clerk manipulated both the creditor and the debtor for his own gains:

He goes to the home of the family and makes a suggestion
A petition has been taken out against you
I say, discharge the debt.

He encourages the other privately
I will get your complaint seen to
I will arrange for a settlement

His treachery works in this way; he hands out bribes
He gives the creditor a false impression
He encourages both sides.[9]

From the temporal power of the Brahman, deriving from literacy and growing in importance with the emergence in the localities of new administrative structures, such as the judicial procedures for the collection of debt, he turned back to their religious power in the organisation of the conventional Hindu year. He recounted all the different ritual occasions upon which the Brahman's services are required, the deceptions practised, and the Brahman's gain:

At Nagapanchmi, on the eighth day of each lunar fortnight
A great weight of Brahman feasts
Rivers of butter on the cakes of wheat

9 Jotirao Phule, *Priestcraft Exposed*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 55–6.

He stretches himself out, he puts his feet up
The trade of the priest in the month of Bhadarapad
He grows sleek and fat

At Vijayadashmi he makes them worship horses
Choice tit-bits on the thirteenth day of the waning moon in Ashvin
The worship of Lakshmi in the account books

At the wedding of the tulasi; at Makarasankrant;
I tell you of the fruits of the whole year
I take my wages in my hand

The money is squandered; the Shudra is ruined
The rites of the Holi remain
Their shouts ring out loud

They dream it all up in their minds; they plan out the houses of the zodiac
A great profusion of religious gifts
The rogues are very clever.[10]

From this, Phule then takes up his argument of the power of Brahman employees in local judicial and revenue institutions, and the corruption which resulted. In the registration of mortgage bonds and debts, and in the drawing up of depositions when cases of debt came to the court, illiterate cultivators were at the mercy of Brahman clerks, who would foment quarrels, alter bonds, and distort depositions in return for bribes and other favours. Brahmans here could extend their power in another way by encouraging a creditor to serve notice, then offering to lend the debtor money himself, with his land as security:

He lives for money only; he has no pity
He arranges for a petition to be served on the owner
He gives the money for the mortgage himself

He waits his chance and achieves his aim
He presses for repayment relentlessly
Demands his money without remorse

The size of the debt is doubled
He copies it down onto the mortgage bond
Now two owners are given on the card in the register

With his ritual purity and the marks of the sacred ashes on his forehead
He storms at the owner
He blames him for every expense.[11]

In this equation of the Brahman with the moneylender, Phule raised a question that was to be of increasing significance for the history of the non-Brahman movement from the 1870s: the identification of the

10 ibid., pp. 56–7. 11 ibid., p. 57.

moneylender, as well as the Brahman, as the enemy of the lower castes. One of the central differences that can be seen between Phule's work and that of later non-Brahman ideologues consisted in their attitudes to the moneylender in rural society. Phule was overwhelmingly concerned with contemporary Hindu religion as a worldview and as the legitimation of a social structure which entangled the *Shudra* in a never-ending series of illusions. The destruction of these illusions formed the precondition for all other kinds of liberation. In so far as Phule was concerned with economic exploitation, what engaged him most was that which took place in every kind of ritual. Later non-Brahman polemicists added the figure of the moneylender to that of the Brahman, and concerned themselves also with the more purely economic exploitation of the former's usurious practices. This shift reflected the more general spread of the non-Brahman movement in the early 1880s from its early base amongst largely urban, commercial, and professional social groups, to the rural centres of the western Deccan, and those more directly engaged in agriculture. As we shall see in chapter 15, however, Phule was able to adapt his account of exploitation in rural society to take account of this shift.

Phule concluded the ballads of *Priestcraft Exposed* with another invocation of history and an appeal to the British government:

> Oh Queen, give us your attention
> I sing of this sorrow, weeping
> The twice-born have deceived the Shudras
>
> Teach the Shudras, my lame brothers
> Brahma first made them slaves
> He prohibited them from learning
>
> Listening to your praises, we came running
> You released the world's slaves
> You gave the example to all.[12]

Brahmans in the British administration

In his short ballad, *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department*, and in the English introduction to *Slavery*, Phule examined more systematically what he saw as the temporal power of Brahmans in local administrative institutions. In the former, the Brahman schoolteacher in a village uses both his religious authority, and his power as a schoolteacher, to withhold education from the *Shudras* living there and

12 ibid., p. 62. The reference in the last verse is to the British abolition of slavery earlier in the century, and recalls Phule's linkage of the condition of the lower castes with those of the negro slaves of America.

to mislead his superiors about the desire or aptitude of the *Shudras* for education. Both the traditional values of the Brahman and the administrative innovations of the Bombay government conspire to reinforce the inequities in village society.

Phule begins by describing the abject condition of the cultivators:

> The Malis and kunbis labour in the fields and pay the taxes
> They don't even get clothes to cover their bodies
> Tiny little children tend the cattle
> They have no shoes, their feet are bare.[13]

He shows how the conventional cultivator, deprived of an education, fails to see the realities of his situation:

> He has no time to learn anything; the father is in anguish
> See, he blames the gods for his misfortunes.[14]

The Brahman schoolteacher and the Brahman *kulkarni*, the village accountant, share the same desire to conserve their privileges in religion and learning. They use their positions as employees of the government, quite indifferent to the older Hindu principle that non-Hindus should be regarded as *mlechcha*, lower than untouchables:

> With the help of the kulkarni the Brahman gathers a few children
> They make up the numbers for the report
> They consider it polluting to teach the children of their great enemies,
> Yet they shake hands with the English
> They adopt the teacher's profession
> Without any shame they preserve their exclusiveness.[15]

The Brahman schoolteacher treats his low caste pupils quite differently from the children of his own caste-follows:

> If the children of their own caste make mistakes, they repeat and explain
> And give punishments wisely
> If other children make mistakes they strike them with their fists
> They twist their ears sharply
> When no one is watching, they beat the Shudra children and make them run away.[16]

13 Jotirao Phule, *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department*, *Satyadipika*, Pune, June 1869, p. 87.
14 ibid. 15 ibid., p. 88. 16 ibid., pp. 88–9.

Brahman school inspectors colluded with the schoolteachers and sent in misleading reports of the educational aptitude of the children of the cultivators:

Inspectors of their own caste
Examine all the masters
The master tells of their qualities
He describes them angrily
He greatly exaggerates the report
I will tell you a little of it
'The caste of Shudras have got no sense
They have no desire for education at all'
This is not true; the Brahmans are impostors
They achieve their ends and promote the position of their own caste
No one brings them to justice.[17]

The Bombay government had failed to take a proper interest in education at the village level, and so knew nothing of the malpractices of its Brahman employees:

When a blind man grinds the corn,
The dogs eat all the flour.[18]

Phule then turned to attack 'reformist' Brahmans. As we saw in chapter 6, Brahman social reformism presented Phule with a peculiar difficulty. On one hand, he held no hopes of real social radicalism from it. On the other, he feared that the apparent willingness of some Brahman groups for social change would further mislead the British administration. This emerged clearly here:

They say that education has made them repentant
In fact they reform themselves only to secure themselves good positions with the British
While at home they continue to worship pieces of stone.[19]

He finished with an appeal for the education of schoolteachers from the lower castes:

Appoint teachers from other castes
Appoint those with a knowledge of the truth
Prepare a class of schoolteachers
Only of Malis and kunbis
Another for Mahars and Mangs.[20]

Phule continued his description in the work *Slavery*, attempting to convey to his British readers, in the English introduction, the unrecognised threat to the power of the administration in the shape of its own executives: 'The Brahman despoils the Shudra not only in his capacity of a

17 ibid., p. 89. 18 ibid., p. 91. 19 ibid. 20 ibid., p. 92.

priest, but does so in a variety of other ways. Having, by his superior education and cunning monopolised all the higher places of emolument, the ingenuity of his ways is past finding out.'[21] He concluded the introduction:

> I have tried to place before my readers in the concluding portions of this book what expedients are employed by these Brahman officials for fleecing the Coonbee in the various departments to which business or his necessities induce him to resort. Anyone knowing intimately the workings of the different departments, and the secret springs which are in motion will unhesitatingly concur with me in saying that what I have described in the following pages is not one hundredth part of the rogueries that are generally practiced on my poor, illiterate and ignorant Shudra brethren.[22]

The most powerful Brahman groups were the *kulkarnis* in the villages, who 'already have their influence firmly established over the Shudras by means of their cunning religion'.[23] The office of the *kulkarni* provided immense opportunities for corruption and extortion:

> Some kulkarnis get hold of whichever Shudras have no idea how to read and write, and lend them money. When they get their signature on the mortgage bond, they employ a writer who is one of their caste-fellows and take him into the plot, write down one thing and read out something else to the ignorant Shudra, put the pen in his hand and get the deed completed. After a few days, they seize hold of the title to the land, following the insertion that they have cunningly made in the document.[24]

Even the boldest and most articulate cultivator had little chance of redress:

> If some daring fellow, clad in a loincloth, plucks up his courage, and with the help of the butler gains a private audience with the European Collector and tells him that his complaint has received no redress, and just the news of these few words reaches the clerks, then that fellow is done for. It will be passed all round the Collector's office, from the Brahman secretary to all the Brahman workers in the revenue and judge's departments. Then half of these cut-throat clerks collect together different sorts of evidence and testimony and make themselves witnesses for the plaintiff, and the other half do the same and become witnesses for the defendant, and throw the man's dispute into absolute chaos.[25]

Phule then turned to describe the powers of the Brahman officials in the city and all the abuses that their peculiar administrative position made possible. In the city, the *mamledar* and the *kulkarni* between them controlled the bureaucratic processes attached to every sort of activity: 'In the municipality of Pune, if some householder wants to build a new privy in place of his old one, he is not allowed to build until he gets the approval of the kulkarni of his ward, through the Brahman

21 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 78.
22 ibid., p. 79. 23 ibid., p. 127. 24 ibid., p. 129. 25 ibid., p. 130.

mamledar.'[26] Bureaucratic processes had been brought into existence, but these lacked overall coherence, and so real power in municipal affairs lay with a small administrative elite. For example: 'The kulkarni has all the plans of the city, to which the names of those who purchase new property must be added. But because there is no practice of giving a copy for examination to the mamledar's office, how is anyone to know whether the kulkarni's report on those places is true?'[27] Brahmans used their majority on the municipal committee to monopolise all the facilities of the city for its Brahman wards, particularly in the control and distribution of water.[28]

Similar corruption was rife among those employed to administer government public works. Phule related numerous stories of this that had been told to him, such as that of the impoverished cultivator and his family whose brother took a job as a labourer building the roads:

> Even there, the Brahmans didn't do a stroke of work; they merely took down the register of those present morning and evening. Then if there should be some criticism of the British government or its religion in the Marathi newspapers, they would preach to the labourers about it, then go back to their lodgings; and for this, even the government gave them twice as much pay as the labourers. And if, on getting his pay, the labourer did not give him something to grease his palm, he would make up all sorts of stories about him to the officer in charge.

The cultivator voices his frustration before this combination of religious and administrative power:

> When my brother comes home from his labouring work, he tells me how the Brahmans harass him quietly in this way, and he says 'What can I do, brother, these Brahmans are the spiritual guides of all the other castes, and our religious books say plainly that we should not complain against them whatever they do.' All my remedies are at an end. Perhaps I should learn to speak English so that I can tell the Sahebs about all the schemes of the Brahmans, then this slavery would be broken.[29]

Finally, Phule argued, Brahmans dominated the expression of public political opinion in the vernacular press. Here, his main worry was that the public inarticulacy of the lower castes, the result of their overall lack of education and of proper organisation, would make them politically invisible. It was bad enough that all the editors of the vernacular newspapers were Brahmans, and that they would never speak a word

26 ibid., p. 131. 27 ibid., p. 131.

28 ibid., pp. 138–9. The Pune Municipality had been established in June 1857 under the Municipality Act of 1850. Until the Local Self-Government Act of 1882, all members were nominated by government. Phule himself served from 1876 to 1882 as a member of the Pune Municipality: see p. 255.

29 Jotirao Phule, *Slavery*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 131–3.

against a member of their own caste. What was even worse was that the government mistakenly believed that the political opinions expressed in the newspapers represented the views of the *Shudras* and untouchables as well as those of their high caste editors:

> If they think this, then our credulous government is very much mistaken. They do not understand that the Brahmans and the Shudras and ati-Shudras never come together in this sort of work in their whole lives. Many ati-Shudras do not even know the meaning of the word 'newspaper'. It might as well be a kind of jackal or a dog or a monkey as far as they are concerned. So how can all these ritually pure newspapers possibly know what the opinions are of all the ati-Shudras that they have never had anything to do with?[30]

Conclusion

In the year of its publication, 1869, Phule's work *Slavery* was reviewed in the literary journal *Vividhadnyan Vistar*. The reviewer made it clear that Phule's work met none of his own criteria for literary merit or historical accuracy. The review began:

> These days, some devotee of Mhasoba by the name of Jotiba, apparently an amateur ballad-singer, has been laying his offerings of ballads before us. But it seems that his skill does not lie only in composing ballads; he gives the impression that he is similarly skilled in ancient history, in religious and moral philosophy and in general knowledge. We have no idea who this man is or where he lives; but we are able to make a guess at his talent from his work. It would demand great effort and intelligence to describe the virtues of his work, so we have here given a few extracts from it, so that our readers may decide for themselves.[31]

The reviewer then went on to describe the contents of *Slavery* and give some examples of Phule's ballads. Finally, he offered his own criticisms of Phule's descriptions of Brahman power in Maharashtrian society. In the first place, some of the friends that Phule had thanked in the introduction to the work were themselves Brahman. Then if it were really true that Brahmans were responsible for the deaths of thousands of untouchables, what would be the fate of Brahmans in India if men like Phule ever came to power and decided to take revenge for these episodes of ancient Indian history? As for Phule's derivations of the terms 'Mahar' and *Kshatriya*, the reviewer suggested that he should consult the Royal Asiatic Society to see what they thought of his ideas. Then, if it were true that Brahmans came from outside India, so did the *Kshatriyas*, which gave the lie to Phule's whole description of pre-Aryan society. In particular, no one ever thought of calling the Mahars

30 ibid., p. 139.
31 *Vividhadnyan Vistar* (Marathi), July 1869.

Kshatriyas, even though in Phule's account they had been the foremost defenders of the pre-Aryan communities.[32]

The answer to the reviewer's criticisms, of course, was that Phule never intended his work as a purely literary or antiquarian contribution to higher research. Rather, he hoped to present an account of the religious and political power of Brahmans in contemporary society that would provide a lower caste follower with a basis for rejecting the Brahman's claims to act as his religious guide. In his work, the lower caste individual would find new explanations and a new mode of perceiving the apparently unequal distribution of political power and resources among different groups. In particular, he would gain a more effective means of understanding what Phule presented as the major new source of power available to Brahman social groups: their position as a clerical and administrative elite under the British government.

32 For V. Chiplunkar's more famous attack on Phule's work, published in his periodical *Nibandhamala* at this time, see D. Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Bombay 1974, pp. 144–9.

14
The Satyashodhak Samaj in the 1870s

Introduction

So far, we have reconstructed the main features of Phule's ideas between 1855 and 1873. In this chapter, we will begin to look at the role that these ideas were to play from 1873, the year in which Phule, his friends, caste-fellows, and business colleagues founded the Satyashodhak Samaj, the 'Truth-Seeking Society'. We will examine the origins of this society, both in the joint organisational efforts of Phule and his circle, and in the broader intellectual and religious milieu of Pune in the 1870s. We will look also at its ideological orientation and the membership that it attracted in the early years of its existence.

The Satyashodhak Samaj was only the first of many efforts of organisation that were to be made by lower caste politicians and ideologues in the last three decades of the century. Different leaders produced their own analyses of the plight of the lower castes, and concentrated on varying areas of organisation and propaganda. Yet they all worked within the same broad set of assumptions about Maharashtra's history and the divisions in her present-day society. These assumptions were of a fundamental division within Maharashtrian society. On one side lay the vast majority of her population, who lived and laboured on the land, who provided for the material support of all other groups, yet who lived in poverty and ignorance. On the other were the small groups of Brahmans and other literate castes, who had added to their existing religious authority a virtual monopoly of English education and of clerical and professional employment in the British administration. The remedy for the plight of the lower castes lay in education, and in schemes of self-help and social reform. Yet their religious and social values, instilled by generations of Brahman preceptors, lay in direct opposition to such schemes.

Some writers and activists made these assumptions very clear. Others bent on more practical schemes of education, or concerned to avoid the charge of stirring up hatred between Brahmans and other castes, were content to allow them to remain implicit. Yet the Satyashodhak Samaj, with these as its most firmly held beliefs, assumed a vital role as the

ideological conscience for all those who identified themselves with the lower castes, whether they belonged to the Samaj or to one of the numerous other groups working for lower caste uplift. Like all consciences, Satyashodhak ideology often seemed to make awkward and uncomfortable demands in its uncompromising radicalism. These demands were often not met even amongst its closest supporters, whilst the Samaj frequently received bitter criticism from those who felt that the same ends could better be served if its demands were couched in terms less obviously hostile to the higher castes. At the same time, however, the Samaj had come to stand, by the end of the nineteenth century, as a symbol of dedication to the cause of the lower castes that was unrivalled by any other group within the broader movement.

Religious reform and indigenous radical traditions in the 1870s

Amongst the different religious reform movements of western India in this period, the Prarthana Samaj, or 'Prayer Society', is one of the most familiar. After the dissolution of the Paramahansa Mandali in the early 1860s, some of its members went on to form the Prarthana Samaj in early 1867. They attempted to combine their strongly-held belief in a single father-god with an observance of the basic social rules of Hinduism. The Samaj's main principle was that 'God is one and without form. It is proper and it is our duty to worship him in a spiritual way. Idolatry is an aberration, it is an insult to God, and debases man and leads him to evil practices.'[1] The members of the Samaj hoped that this more oblique approach to the social evils of idolatry and caste division would win greater popular acceptance where the more ruthless attack of the Paramahansa Mandali had failed. M. G. Ranade joined the Prarthana Samaj in 1869, quickly became a dominant influence and set about giving coherence to its religious views. Ranade argued that all the religions of the world were in a process of evolution towards a 'Pure Theism', that would eventually transcend all conventional religious confessions. The Prarthana Samaj could claim to be in the forefront of this movement. To this evolutionary view of religion, the Samaj added a growing interest in the work of Maharashtra's devotional poet–saints, especially in the seventeenth-century poet Tukaram, whom the Samaj came to see as a theist of an older kind. The Prarthana Samaj thus led the search amongst Maharashtra's intellec-

1 Quoted in M. R. Lederle, *Philosophical Trends in Modern Maharashtra*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1976, p. 80. For an account of the Prarthana Samaj, see also J. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 81–5.

tuals for a synthesis that would incorporate all that was best in the Hindu tradition, while taking account of the criticisms of caste and idolatry that were made by Hindu radicals and European observers alike. They found the material for this synthesis in the work of the poet–saints, whose ecstatic love for a personal God was unmistakably Hindu in origin, and who had themselves strongly deprecated the rigid hierarchies of caste, or the undiscriminating reverence for Brahmans, that characterised contemporary Hindu practice.[2]

The Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 in Bombay by Dayananda Sarasvati, turned to the more ancient past to discover a 'pure' Hinduism with which to confront the corruption of Hinduism in the present. Dayananda set out the religious basis for the Arya Samaj in his book *Satyartha Prakash*, published in 1875.[3] Dayananda argued that the Vedas contained Hindu beliefs in their most ancient and pure form, showing God to be an omniscient, omnipotent, merciful, just and infinite Creator, who was distinct from his Creation. The social hierarchies of Vedic society had been based on the merit, ability, and temperament of the individual, rather than on his birth. Dayananda called for the purging of the degenerate practices of Hindus in the present, and for a return to Vedic religion in all its simplicity and purity. The Arya Samaj of Bombay was inaugurated on 10 April 1875. It was from the start dominated by Gujurathi business magnates, such as Mulji Thakershi, a wealthy mill-owner, and Lakhmidas Khimji, a Bhatia, who had taken a leading part in the crusade against the Vallabhacharaya Maharajas for their encouragement of corrupt and licentious habits amongst their devotees.[4] The Arya Samaj laid great emphasis on the reform of religious ritual. The Samaj rejected the idea that the transaction between the believer and his God, carried out in religious ritual, should automatically have to be mediated by a Brahman priest, who would conduct the ritual in a language incomprehensible to the participants. The *Dnyanodaya* newspaper of 6 April 1876 contained an account of a ritual, carried out under the auspices of the Samaj, which stressed the direct and personal relationship between God and

2 For a good short account of this devotional or *bhakti* tradition in Hinduism, see R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, Oxford University Press 1980, pp. 125–46. On the *bhakti* cults of Maharashtra, see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, Pune 1960. For a collection of essays on different aspects of *bhakti* in India, see J. Lele (ed.), *Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1981.

3 On the ideology of the Arya Samaj, see J. T. F. Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1978, pp. 127–59.

4 For an account of this dispute, see Christine Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India: Politics and Communities in Bombay City, 1840–1885*, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 65–70.

the believer, rather than the mediating role of the priest. The ritual was a sacred thread ceremony, carried out for the son of one Harichandra Chintaman by Dayananda Sarasvati himself. Some aspects of the ceremony were much the same as the conventional Hindu ritual: an auspicious moment was chosen for the occasion, the boy was invested with the sacred thread, and Brahman priests were on hand to assist Dayananda. What was different was the emphasis on the participation and comprehension of the boy himself and the gathered believers. The boy's age was about twelve years rather than the customary six to eight; the Vedic verses that were spoken in Sanskrit were then translated to the boy; and Dayananda gave a final homily to the audience in their own language. In his work on Dayananda Sarasvati, J. T. F. Jordens describes how the members of the Arya Samaj wished for a religious organisation of their own that would be independent of the corruptions of conventional Hinduism. They turned towards what they regarded as the original sources of Hinduism, searching for a pure form of religious practice for which they could feel respect.[5]

This emphasis on a return to the purity of Vedic society would appear at first sight to contrast very strongly with Jotirao Phule's earlier depiction of the ancient Aryans as the source of all religious oppression in present-day India. However, Phule and Dayananda did share in common the belief in one God, and the desire for a form of social organisation that would reflect the merits and aptitudes of the individual, rather than enforcing birth as the basis both for occupation and for religious status. Phule recognised Dayananda's emphasis on Aryan society as a means to an end with much in common with his own. In September 1875, therefore, we find Phule and his friends taking a prominent part in a procession in Pune given in honour of Dayananda. The organisers of the procession, fearing opposition from the conservative Brahman party, asked Phule and his friends for their support. The procession included other reformers, notably M. G. Ranade. The opposition constructed an effigy of Dayananda, put garlands around its neck, sat it on an ass, and followed the main procession, exchanging insults and blows with Dayananda's supporters. The procession carried on regardless, and finished with a gathering at the end of the day to hear speeches on social and religious reform.[6]

Besides these two reform societies, there were also other individuals and small groups in Pune, much less prominent or well organised, who turned to the Hindu past to find material for their criticisms of the present. This is particularly important for our purposes, since a few of

5 J. T. F. Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati*, p. 140.

6 P. S. Patil, *The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule*, Chikhali 1927 (Marathi), pp. 84–6.

these religious radicals were included amongst Phule's friends and colleagues, while others were to join him in the Satyashodhak Samaj. The influence of radicalism drawn from sources within the Hindu tradition is important both for our understanding of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and for our view of the development of Phule's ideas. Phule's own brand of religious radicalism has been traced back to the religious and intellectual upheavals of the 1840s and 1850s. Throughout his career, however, his circle included writers and activists who shared his concerns, and whose ideas owed more to older and indigenous movements of opposition to Brahmanic Hinduism. Phule undoubtedly shared and discussed his theories with men like these. Before we go on to look at the founding of the Satyashodak Samaj, it will be useful to look at the influence of pre-nineteenth-century religious radicalism, to assess its importance in Satyashodhak ideology. This will also help us to appreciate what he came to owe to fellow radicals. From this perspective, his work appears not only as an individual effort of criticism and imagination, but also as the product of a pooling of experience and ideas amongst a number of like-minded men, some of whom brought to these exchanges an older variety of religious radicalism.

The greater religious systems of Hinduism have always been accompanied by individuals or groups who challenged them. The objects of criticism were most frequently the religious authority of Brahmans, the division of society into castes based on birth, and the elaboration of ritual, pilgrimages, and asceticism as means of winning religious merit. Chief amongst these traditions of criticism were the devotional *bhakti* cults, which originated from the tenth century in south India, and flourished in central and northern India between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. The *bhakti* sect was characterised by the abandonment of the self in devotion and love for a personal God, and by the deprecation of all man-made social and religious distinctions. One of the earliest of these poet–saints in northern India was Ramanand, who came to Banaras from the south of India in the fourteenth century, wrote in the vernacular instead of Sanskrit, and accepted followers from all castes. The most important of his followers were Nanak, who was active in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and Kabir. Nanak, the founder of the Sikh community, was a monotheist and a bitter opponent of the rigid hierarchies of caste. Kabir was originally a Muslim, who abandoned Islam and set out to found a religion in which there would be no man-made barrier between the individual and his God. He directed biting criticism at the pretensions of Brahmans to special religious authority in mediating between man and God. It is

significant that, unlike other devotional sects, the extreme anti-Brahman and anti-caste stance of the Sikhs and the followers of Kabir meant that they have remained separated from the larger body of Hindu society. Where, on the other hand, the followers of a devotional sect saw *bhakti* as a supplement to Brahmanic religion that might be more accessible than the rigours of a path to God through knowledge and self-discipline, an accommodation within Hindu society was much easier. This was rather more the character of the Maratha saint–poets, Jnaneshvar, Namadev, Ekanath and, most important, the seventeenth-century poet Tukaram, whom we have already seen adopted by the Prarthana Samaj. Tukaram exhorted his followers to reject the idea of attaining merit and salvation by reading holy books, fulfilling caste obligations, making gifts to Brahmans, or subjecting the body to extremes of asceticism. The love of God was more important than all of these. It was not caste superiority that made a man holy, but simply his love for God. A true Brahman was one who loved God with a pure heart, and such a man might be of any caste, even an untouchable.

Besides the major figures of the *bhakti* movement in Maharashtra and elsewhere in India, there were also available to nineteenth-century reformers and radicals the ideas of a very diverse mixture of critics of Brahmanic religion, whose antecedents are less well documented. One of the most important of these was a fiercely anti-Brahman tract called the *Vajrasuchi*, or *Vajrasuchik-Upanishad*. The religious historian, R. C. Dhere, has estimated that this text goes back to the ninth century or earlier.[7] The identity of its author is uncertain. It was most frequently ascribed to one Ashva Ghosh, who may have been a Buddhist monk. Dhere traces the influence of this work upon the Marathi saint–poets, Bahinabai, a disciple of Tukaram, and Shrirshyamaraj, brother of the poet Gopalanath, who was writing early in the eighteenth century. The influence of the *Vajrasuchi* appears again early in the nineteenth century, in the writing of a Gurav living near Pune, who composed a work called the *Nathalilamarat*, in which he paraphrased parts of the *Vajrasuchi*.[8] In 1829, the British Resident at Kathmandu, Mr B. M. Hodgson, was presented with a copy by a Buddhist friend. Hodgson was interested by the contents, had a translation made, and read it to the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1831. During

7 R. C. Dhere, *Santasahitya ani Lokasahitya: Kahi Anubandh*, Pune 1978 (Marathi), pp. 92–121. I owe this reference to Y. D. Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar: Kahi Anubandh*, Pune 1979 (Marathi), pp. 42–3.

8 *Guravas* are a *Shudra* caste, employed in the service of temples, and are usually worshippers of Shiva.

the nineteenth century, the reformers Ram Mohan Roy, Dadoba Pandurang, and Vir Savarakar also found support for their ideas in the work.[9]

A close friend and colleague of Phule's was the Bhandari reformer from Bombay, Tukaram Tatya Padaval. We have already seen how Phule volunteered to publish the second edition of his work, *A Critique of Caste Divisions*, which appeared in Bombay in 1865. Padaval wrote in the introduction to the work that he had modelled some of his arguments upon those used in the *Vajrasuchi*, and because of its usefulness had included a translation of the work at the end of his book.[10]

What was striking about the *Vajrasuchi* was that it used arguments, taken from within the Hindu scriptures, to refute the principles usually advanced to support caste divisions. It led the reader to conclusions very similar to those reached by the religious reformers of the 1840s and 1850s, and was quite compatible with the arguments of Christian missionaries and the anti-clericalism of European religious radicals, from which these reformers had drawn much of their inspiration. The *Vajrasuchi* began by asking what Brahmanhood consisted of: whether it derived from a man's parentage, his wisdom, his actions, or his reading of the Vedas. Brahmanhood could not lie in birth, since there were instances in the Hindu scriptures of people being born even of animals, who later attained to Brahmanhood. It could not be wisdom, because many *Shudras* had also acquired great wisdom. It could not be virtuous conduct, or many *Shudras* would also be Brahmans. It could not be reading the Vedas, for Ravana, the demon King of the *Ramayana*, was deeply versed in the Vedas. The *Vajrasuchi* then turned to attack the doctrine of the division of society into four classes or *varnas*. It was not true that the *Shudras* were the lowest of the four simply because they were mentioned last. If all the four *varnas* had proceeded from the body of the god Brahma, as the Hindu scriptures said they did, then they must all be alike. If a father and mother had four sons, they were essentially equal and alike. The similarity of all men's physical and emotional faculties also proclaimed their essential likeness. In fact, the author argued, the division of Hindu society into *varnas* had been in origin only a division of occupations that had become rigid through the

9 The work was eventually published as *The Wujra Soochi or Refutation of the Arguments upon which the Brahminical Institution of Caste is founded: by the learned Boodhist Ashwa Ghosa, also the Tunku by Soobaji Bapoo, being a Reply to the Wujra Soochi, 1839*. A copy of this is in the Jayakar Library, University of Pune. It has an introduction by L. Wilkinson, the Political Agent at Bhopaul, with a letter from Hodgson introducing the contents of the pamphlet.

10 Tukaram Tatya Padaval, *A Critique of Caste Divisions*, Bombay 1865. Introduction to the first edition.

passage of time. It was clear, therefore, that true Brahmanhood resided in the merit and virtue of the individual, and that birth had nothing to do with it.

For a reformer like Padaval, a tract such as the *Vajrasuchi* would have served, as confirmation from another source, to reinforce the radical ideas of religion that were already in circulation in the 1840s and 1850s. This was also very likely the case with Dadoba Pandurang, some of whose ideas we examined in chapter 4. R. C. Dhere has pointed out the close parallels with the argument of one of the chapters of Dadoba's work *A discussion on religion*, published in 1868.[11] In the sixth chapter, entitled 'The whole of human kind is of one caste', Dadoba asked what caste superiority consisted of, eliminated the various possibilities in the same way as the author of the *Vajrasuchi*, and concluded that men were distinguished from one another by their virtue, not by their birth. For Dadoba as for Padaval, his reading of the *Vajrasuchi* combined to reinforce the radical ideas such as those that he absorbed from the agnostic Henry Green, and from the strategies that the Christian missionaries employed to undermine the principle of a religious hierarchy with Brahmans at its head.

There is no record that Phule and Dadoba Pandurang ever met. Another young radical, who drew his ideas in part from indigenous sources, and who was to play a very important part in the Satyashodhak Samaj, was Krshnarao Bhalekar. Bhalekar (1850–1910) was born in the village of Bhamburade, near Pune. His family, like Phule's, were Malis. They moved to Pune after Bhalekar was born, where his father went to work as a clerk in the District Court. Left an orphan at the age of sixteen, Bhalekar went for his education to one of the mission schools in Pune, and then started work in the English office of the the District Judge's Court in Pune.[12] He was very active in the late 1860s and early 1870s, organising anti-Brahman activities in his native village. He described how his search for religious truth had begun while he had been at the mission school, between 1864 and 1868. In 1866, he began to go regularly to hear the public lectures that were given in his village by a Hindu *sadhu*, Jangali Maharaj. Listening to these lectures, he became convinced that many Hindus had wandered into religious error because of their ignorance, and that it was upon this ignorance that the Brahmans relied to make a living. With a group of his friends, Bhalekar

11 R. C. Dhere, *Santasahitya ani Lokasahitya*, pp. 118–19.

12 Krshnarao Bhalekar, MS autobiography entitled *A short history of Krshnarao Bhalekar* (Marathi), unpaginated. Bhalekar's papers are in the large and valuable MSS collection held by Dr R. M. Patil of Pune. For a very good account of Bhalekar's career, see Y. D. Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar*, pp. 41–64.

accepted Jangali Maharaj as his *guru*, and accompanied him on a pilgrimage to Alandi, sacred to the memory of Tukaram.

Fortified with his new religious convictions, Bhalekar wrote in 1868 a book of poems attacking the vanity of empty rituals. He then staged a mock *Satyanarayan* ritual in his village[13] and invited the villagers to watch. A crowd of people gathered, and some criticised him for making fun of his own religion, but they watched all the same. Since this was not very popular, Bhalekar devised a performance on another aspect of relations between Brahmans and other castes. This was a play, called *Sir Ignorance, the credulous Deshmukh*. It described how the ignorance of Rajas, landowners, and others in positions of power allowed their ministers to deceive and take advantage of them. Bhalekar and his friends, who included one of the Brahmans of the village, performed this play one night in front of the temple of Vithoba. Bhalekar also established a library for the poor in the temple. Eventually, Phule in Pune heard of Bhalekar's activities, and went to visit him in Bhamburade. The pair discovered that their families were related, and from that time Bhalekar began to make regular visits to Phule's shop in Pune, where he and his friends met for discussions in the period immediately before the founding of the Satyashodhak Samaj.

Gyanoba Krshnaji Sasane, born of a Mali family in the village of Hadapsar, near Pune, in 1851, was another of Phule's circle whose religious radicalism derived in part from indigenous sources. His great-grandfather had been in the army, but the family had settled down as farmers in the village of Hadapsar.[14] Sasane's grandfather, Mhasaji, had been a devoted follower of the anti-Brahmanical and devotional sect founded in north India by Kabir. The once-prosperous family fell into poverty and debt in Sasane's father's time, but this did not stop the young Sasane going to school in Hadapsar, spending the daytime tending cattle and breaking stones, and going to school in the evening. At the age of thirteen he found his mind turning towards questions of religion. He left the village and took up the life of a *sanyasi*, a wandering religious ascetic. On his travels he fell with a *bairagi*, a religious mendicant, who was a follower of Ramanuja, the great theistic philosopher, active in the eleventh century, who provided the philosophical basis on which many of the later *bhakti* cults were founded.

13 The Satyanarayan is an act of worship which may be carried out at any time of the year, either in thanks for some good fortune, or in the hope that a particular request might be granted.

14 Gyanoba Sasane, MS autobiography (Marathi), unpaginated. This MS is in Dr R. M. Patil's collection. It was written down, to Sasane's dictation, by a poor boy in Hadapsar, after Sasane had arranged for him to receive a small monthly allowance from the Scottish mission in the village, so that he could attend the village school.

Sasane was drawn towards the path of *bhakti*, and spent much time reading and questioning the holy men and ascetics that he encountered. After three years Sasane tired of the life of a mendicant, threw off his *bairagi*'s clothes and returned to his village, where he took a job working as a clerk for a contractor, getting stone for construction works in Pune. Sasane first came into contact with Phule when he was in his early twenties, and searching for a wife. Phule used his influence in the local Mali community to help Sasane and a wife was found in the family of Narayanrao Vithoba Shinde, of Paravati village, near Pune. This was in 1874, the year after the founding of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and Phule persuaded both families to have the marriage conducted according to Satyashodhak principles, without the aid of a Brahman priest. The ceremony passed off successfully, despite fierce opposition, both from within the Mali community in Pune and from the local Brahmans. Sasane kept up his contacts with Phule, joining him as a business partner in the late 1870s in a scheme to transport vegetables from Pune to be sold in the markets of Bombay. Throughout this period, Sasane's interest in religious questions remained undiminished. He showed the same capacity, which we saw in Padaval and Bhalekar, to combine ideas from a very wide range of sources to form his own distinctive understanding of social and religious reform. As well as being a member of the Satyashodhak Samaj, he also became very friendly with two Christian converts in Hadapsar, Ramachandrapant Bhaskar and Kashinathpant Panchandikar. He came into contact with the convert and ordained priest, Baba Padmanji, whose books he read with pleasure. During the 1890s he joined forces with some of the Scottish missionaries from Pune to open a school in Hadapsar, which he ran successfully for many years. To the end of his life he also maintained his interest in the study of *bhakti* texts, journeying to Pandharpur and Alandi to have them elucidated.

We turn now to the period immediately before the founding of the Satyashodhak Samaj, where again we find evidence of the influence of the ideas of Kabir on Phule and his circle. Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan, who later became a member of the Satyashodhak Samaj, described how, a few months before its foundation, Phule's friends and colleagues used to gather every Sunday at his shop in Pune. Amongst those who came was Dnyanagiri Buva, a member of the Kabir *panth*. Dnyanagiri Buva used to read to the assembled gathering from the *Bijak* book written by Kabir, translating it from its original Brij into Marathi. The book contained much information about the selfishness and evil conduct of Brahmans. Phule, Pinjan recalled, had long since been convinced that the non-Brahmans suffered all sorts of difficulties as a

result of Brahman attitudes. Having received further confirmation of this belief in the writings of Kabir, he began to turn over in his mind the practical steps that would improve their position. The gathering agreed to Phule's proposal that they should organise themselves into a definite society and, after much discussion, upon the name, the Satyashodhak Samaj, the 'Truth-Seeking Society', and it was inaugurated on 24 September 1873.[15]

Organisation and propaganda in the early Satyashodhak Samaj

The members of the new society lost no time in making known the purpose of their activities. There was certainly none of the secrecy that characterised the Paramahansa Mandali. The *Satyadipika* newspaper of October 1873, then edited by Baba Padmanji, reported that a great revolution was at present going on in Pune. About 700 families from the *kunbi*, Mali, potter, carpenter, and other *Shudra* castes had launched a movement to make themselves independent in religious matters from Brahmans. The present fortnight of the month of Bhadarapad was the time appointed for making offerings to the spirits of male ancestors. These families were refusing to call Brahmans to perform these ceremonies as was customary, and were giving to their own caste-fellows the food which would otherwise have been offered to the priest. The aims of the society were clearly set out by its secretary, Narayan Tukaram Nagarakar, in the first report of its activities that was published in 1877:

> Some wise gentlemen founded this Samaj on the 24 September 1873, in order to free the Shudra people from slavery to Brahmans, Bhats, Joshis, priests and others. For thousands of years, these people have heedlessly despised and exploited the Shudras, with the aid of their cunningly-devised books. This action was taken, therefore, so that through good advice and the spread of education, the Shudras might be got to understand their real rights, and freed both in religious and more general matters from the false and self-interested books of the Brahmans.[16]

Nagarakar subscribed strongly to the view that British rule represented a unique opportunity for the *Shudras* to acquire the education, self-respect, and independence of judgement that they had always

15 Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan to Mukundrao Patil, 11 July 1923. This letter is reprinted in *Purogami Satyashodhak*, Pune, vol 3, no. 1, January–March 1977.

16 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1873 to 24 September 1875*, Dnyanprakash Press, Pune 1877 (Marathi), p. 1. The society published two reports in 1877, the first dealing with its first two years of activity, and the second dealing with the year from September 1875 to September 1876. The original editions of both are in the P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

lacked while their faith in Hindu religion remained unquestioned. Nagarakar finished the report with an exhortation to the members of the society:

Because of the unprejudiced and altruistic wisdom [of the British government] all castes, great and small, have had a chance to partake of the benefits of education. At present, the ignorant state of the people, and their foolish religious beliefs, has meant that the proportionate spread of education among the Shudras, compared to other people, is very small. So this is the time that we should be carrying out reforms among our people. We must hope that the educated amongst us will look to the reform of the country and of their own people, that they will have no fear of the wiles of cunning people, and will not hesitate to fix their minds firmly on following the truth. If they do hesitate, then our Shudra brothers will never free themselves from the prison of mental slavery.[17]

The society had a clear set of rules, twenty-eight in number, that were drawn up shortly after its inauguration.[18] The first rule stated that the condition of the *Shudra* at present was appalling and that the society had been established to make some amends for the terrible neglect that prevailed concerning the real rights of men, their duties and proper course of action, and the means that must be employed to remedy the miseries of the *Shudras* themselves. The next rule settled the name of the society, and the third stipulated that the rules had been laid down to ensure the smooth running of the society. The fourth rule forbade all discussion of political issues. The fifth and sixth allowed people of other castes and towns to join the society, provided they accepted its rules. The seventh and eighth dealt with details of internal organisation. The ninth, one of the most important, set out the vows that all members of the society were required to take on joining it. These were as follows:

1 I will not worship anything except our Creator.
2 I will not bring into discredit the pure rights that have been given by our Creator by countenancing either those who, through the arrogant assumptions in their books, behave as though others were inferior, or those who accept such inferiority.
3 I will stop being party to the killing of animals, and will give up alcohol, as far as I can.
4 I will hold firmly to my pride in the truth, will help the old, the lame, and the very young in our society, and will strive to give enough education to all our children that they may understand their rights.

17 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1873 to 24 September 1875*, p. 8.

18 The second report of the society mentions a set of rules that were decided on at the anniversary of its foundation, held on 24 September 1875. I have not been able to find an original copy of them, but they were reprinted in the *Din Bandhu* newspaper of 22 and 29 April 1894. A comparison between these, and the commentary on the rules made in the second report, suggests very strongly that these were the original rules of the society.

The tenth rule stipulated that each member should give the fruits of one day's work a year for the society's expenses. The next twelve rules dealt with internal organisation: the election of officers and other decisions of the society were to be taken by majority opinion, a managing committee was elected to look after routine business, and a meeting of all members should take place four times a year. The twenty-third rule turned once more to the aims of the society. It contained four clauses. The first was that members should spread truth and right-thinking amongst their people, and the second that they should advise their people, through newspapers and lectures, about men's real rights and duties in the world. The third clause stipulated that they should make every effort to spread education by teaching women and children, by helping those who wished to go to the University in Bombay, and spreading the knowledge of improved techniques in agriculture. The fourth and final clause was that they should attempt to curb vice and harmful social practices. The remainder of the rules reverted again to details of organisation.

From its inception, the society devoted a very large part of its energy to the proselytisation of the lower caste communities in Pune and the surrounding villages. Members toured, lecturing and distributing tracts, giving *upadesh*, or 'advice'. The society's first report praised the efforts of Krshnarao Bhalekar, Ravaji Sirole, and others of the village of Bhamburade. Having become members themselves, they had established a branch of the society in the village and, with the help of poetry and music, had given advice to the villagers and won over new members. In the village of Hadapsar many had become members, and the business of imparting advice was proceeding very satisfactorily. In the village of Paravati, the cause of the society had been taken up by the Police Patil, who was making many efforts on its behalf. Early in 1874 some of the leaders of the Telugu Mali community in Bombay had invited Phule to address them, and had formed a branch of the society. Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru, Narasinharao Sayabu Vadnala, Jaya Ellappa Lingu, and Vyanku Baloji Kalevar were leading the efforts in Bombay, and carring out many reforms in the community. In the village of Bhilar in Satara district, Govindrao Bapuji Bhilar, the *patil* of the village, had heard of the aims of the society, and lost no time in establishing a branch in Bhilar. He had given advice and won new members, and had ventured to carry out a number of marriages without the assistance of the local Brahmans. Gyanu Malharaji Jagade, a Phulmali from the village of Kavadi near Pune, had used the contacts that his position as a superintendant of labourers had brought to give advice to about fifty people, some of whom had become members.

Bhikoba Balaji, of the weaver caste, had brought many people back to the path of religious truth. Dhondiram Namadev Kumbhar, a potter, and Pandarinath Abaji Chavan had toured, reading poetry and lectures that told of how cunning people exploited the ignorant *Shudras*.[19]

The manuscript account book of the society for the period 1873 to 1876 gives us a very clear idea of the tone of much of this proselytisation. One of the standard tactics of the society was simply to distribute free copies of Phule's and other polemical works in the villages around Pune. In July 1874, books were given away free to the people of the village of Bhamburade. These books were Phule's works, *Slavery*, *Priestcraft Exposed*, and *A Ballad of the Chatrapati Raja Shivaji Bhosale*. Also included were Tukaram Tatya Padaval's *A Critique of Caste Divisions*, and Dadoba Pandurang's work *A discussion on religion* that had served as a text for the Paramahansa Mandali in the 1860s. Another entry in the account book, for 24 September 1874, recorded that Phule's and Dadoba's works were also to be distributed in the town of Ahmadnagar, some sixty miles to the north-east of Pune.[20] Phule's earlier efforts to couch his work in language that could be easily understood by a popular audience meant that his books were particularly suited to distribution in this way.

This emphasis on active proselytisation may well have been an indirect borrowing from protestant missionary strategies. The role of the Satyashodhak 'adviser' was not to win acceptance for his spiritual authority in the way, for example, that Krshnarao Bhalekar had accepted the spiritual authority of Jangali Maharaj when he made him his *guru*. Rather, his purpose was to provide information and a commentary on the issues of caste and religious worship, so that every individual would be given a basis of religious 'truth', on which he might make his own decisions. The conviction that the society was a purveyor of religious truth and light, surrounded on all sides by darkness and error, was also strongly reminiscent of the missionaries' sense of their role.

Projects of education also figured very largely in the early activities of the society. This emphasis on education was to provide one of the most important themes of the broader non-Brahman movement as it developed towards the end of the century. Education came to be seen as the panacea for almost every social and religious evil. Non-Brahman

19 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1873 to 24 September 1875*, pp. 1–6.

20 This MS account book is in the Marathi Modi script, and is in the P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur. As it is unpaginated, I have given all references to the dates of the entries in the book, rather than to folio numbers.

leaders regarded it as having three purposes. First, it provided the occupational skills, from basic literacy to fluent English, that the lower castes needed if they were to win a share of employment in administration and the professions, proportionate to their numbers in the population of the Bombay Presidency. Second, a western secular education seemed to offer intellectual emancipation from many of the doctrines of Brahmanic Hinduism, from the belief in divine or magical powers active in the natural world, to the idea that any particular individual or religious group possessed the means to control such powers. Finally, education would help to bring about a reformation of popular manners. The idea of such a reformation was to take a central place in the programme of every non-Brahman activist and polemicist. Many were convinced that a combination of harmful social customs, such as child marriage, heavy expenditure on weddings, and the reluctance to educate women, undermined the ability of the lower castes to reach any sort of secular prosperity and well-being, let alone to compete for a share of the occupational and educational benefits dispensed by the British government. Added to these harmful customs were what non-Brahman leaders saw as the besetting vices of the lower castes, particularly the rural communities, which had been given the sanction of long usage. These included drinking, habitual debt, the reluctance to continue working hard when stores of grain were full after a good harvest, the holding of village *tamashas*, with the drunkenness and lewd singing and dancing that often accompanied them, gambling, prostitution, quarrelsomeness and litigation, and even the predilection of the cultivators for spending too much time gossiping and smoking with their neighbours. Two of these problems, drinking and debt, would have been a cause for concern in any circumstances. The question of debt was, of course, to the forefront of every discussion concerning the well-being of the rural communities. There was also a growing body of opinion in the Presidency that the excise policy of the government of Bombay served to increase drunkenness and alchoholism by licensing growing numbers of liquor shops, from which it drew a large revenue.[21] However, non-Brahman leaders regarded the more perennial 'vices' of the lower castes as equally damaging. The traditional religious preceptors of the cultivators had signally failed even to recognise the existence of a problem. A proper secular education would attack the root of these vices, which lay in the ignorance of the people.

21 See Dhananjay Deer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 161–4, for an account of the exchanges between the Pune Municipality and local British officials over the problem of alchohol control in Pune.

In the report of the society's activities in the year beginning September 1875, therefore, eighteen out of the twenty-nine resolutions that it contained were concerned with education. Dr Vishram Ramji Gholay, of the *gavali* caste of cow-herds, now employed as a surgeon in government service, and Ramasheth Bapusheth Uravane, a wealthy Pune merchant, agreed to provide a prize for the best essay written by a *Shudra* on the differences between Indian agriculture and agriculture abroad, and the best means of bringing Indian agriculture up to the same standard. Krshnarao Bhalekar was planning to start a night school in his village of Bhamburade for those who did not have the leisure to study during the day. The society decided that it would pay a servant Rs 5 a month to collect up the children of the *Shudras* from the streets of Pune and shepherd them to school. This would stop them from picking up bad habits, and encourage a taste for learning. Some members of the society, including Phule, were delegated to conduct examinations amongst the children of the *Shudras* at two of the government Marathi schools in Pune, and to distribute prizes and sweets. A sub-committee was appointed to look into the possibility of opening a boarding-house in Pune, so that young *Shudra* students could come to Pune to study under proper supervision. The society had opened a school in the nearby village of Hadapsar. The intention had been that the society should contribute Rs 4 towards its running costs, while the villagers were to make up the remaining Rs 6 themselves. Either the villagers were too poor, however, or the society had yet to get its message understood, for the villagers had failed to raise their amount, and the school had to be closed. The report also recorded two very early examples of what was to become one of the most important and controversial of non-Brahman strategies in the struggle to improve the lower caste communities' share of educational benefits: the demand that a limited positive discrimination should be exercised in their favour. The society had petitioned Mr Cook, the principal of the Engineering College in Pune, to take a few poor students free, and he had agreed to do this. Mr Chatfield, the Director of Public Instruction in the Presidency, had likewise been approached, and he had agreed that of 1,000 free places given annually in the government schools, five should go to poor children of the *Shudra* castes.[22]

Linked with this emphasis on education was a concern with public articulacy. The leaders of the society felt that their own members, and the *Shudra* communities at large, lacked the experience necessary to make coherent and convincing public speeches, or to express them-

22 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1875 to 24 September 1876*, pp. 2–4.

selves confidently in writing, whether in letters to newspapers, or in framing petitions such as those asking for preferential treatment. Their lack of the influence and personal contacts bestowed by government employment had already meant that these groups had a low social and political visibility in public life. Their inarticulacy only compounded this inconspicuousness. In its early years, therefore, the Samaj arranged essay and debating competitions to sharpen up their members' skills in public speaking and writing. The *Dnyanodaya* newspaper of 1 June 1876 reported on the first competition, which had been held on the 22 May. The subjects appointed were the advantages and disadvantages brought upon the country first by the worship of idols, and secondly by the institution of caste. Candidates, of whom there were five, wrote an essay on either subject, and read it out before the assembled members. Dr Gholay, then president of the society, explained the purpose of the competition in his address. He made it clear that the society had a definite rival in mind in its sense that its members had to compete for public attention: the Pune Sarvajanik Sabha. Some years before, the Sabha had set up its own debating society. The children of the *Shudras* did not have the confidence to go there and speak, and so it was necessary that they should first be able to practice amongst themselves. Having once acquired these skills, they would launch themselves upon the more public forum of the Sabha's society. Another competition was held in 1877, in which the subjects were the condition of the untouchables, and the reasons why the *Shudras* were always the first to die whenever famines occurred in India.[23] The subject for the 1878 competition, which was sponsored by Krshnarao Bhalekar, Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan, and Ramasheth Bapusheth Uravane, was to explain why it was that:

> Some people of the Shudra caste, into which were born the hero Chatrapati Maharaja Shivaji, and the great rulers of states, Shinde, Holkar, Gayakavad and others, do not feel it a humiliation when they perform tasks such as looking after the shoes of Brahmans. When, however, some of the Brahman caste go from house to house begging alms, they would scorn even to touch the shawls of Shudra Rajas and princes, let alone their shoes.[24]

Religious innovation in the Satyashodhak Samaj

This capacity for a common commitment to secular welfare was, however, only to be the outward symbol of a deeper sense of unity and

23 Reported in the *Dnyanodaya* (English–Marathi), 12 April 1877.

24 *Dnyanodaya*, 28 February 1878. This is a reference to the powerful Shinde family, who were supposed to have started their service of the peshwas as the bearers of their slippers.

independence amongst the lower caste communities that the leaders of the society sought to create. Crucial to the realisation of this unity were matters of religious worship and ritual. Phule and others hoped that the society would take the lead in establishing the idea of the *Shudras* as a new moral community, independent of Brahmanic Hinduism. The Society would express this spirit through the worship of a Supreme God that transcended all conventional religious confessions, including Hinduism, and by taking into their own hands the conduct of all ceremonies and other social occasions which required a religious sanctification through the performance of ritual.

The decision to dispense with Brahman priests struck, as the leaders of the society intended, at the very heart of existing Hindu ideas about the proper means of access to divine power. By insisting that God was available to all his human creatures, that no intermediary was necessary for the invocation of divine power, the society attempted to remove any justification for the special sanctity of Brahmans. However, the very radicalism of the society here opened possibilities for difficulty and conflict that were proportionately great. Struggling to establish a fragile basis of co-operation between a range of different caste groups and already established leaders, the society was not in the best position to withstand religious controversy.

Not the least of its difficulties was to agree upon the nature and characteristics of the Supreme God. There was the problem of ritual and worship itself. Members of the society were encouraged to carry out their own, and yet it was not clear who would provide the specialised knowledge of ritual techniques that was required or, indeed, whether members should attempt to copy Brahmanic rituals at all, or should try to devise new ones of their own. The claim to *Kshatriya* status, that characterised both Phule's account of the real identity of the *Shudra* castes, and which we have seen as a persistent concern in the Maratha-*kunbi* complex itself, compounded the problems of devising suitable religious ceremonies for the members of the society. Phule had hoped that these great rural communities of the Maratha-*kunbis* would form the natural constituency of the Satyashodhak Samaj. He had taken up the issue of *Kshatriya* status both because he saw it as one of their perennial concerns, and because it symbolised a longer tradition of conflict with Brahman religious opinion. The idea of a *Kshatriya* identity depended for its radicalism upon Phule's larger interpretation of ancient Indian history. Unless it was placed against the background idea of the Aryan invasions and the expropriation of the original *Kshatriyas* of ancient India, such claims by Satyashodhak members became little more than an ordinary attempt at Sanskritisation. The

appeal and ideological effectiveness of Phule's scheme derived directly from this tension or ambiguity. In the Satyashodhak Samaj, there were always to be differences of emphasis on this point, with some groups concerned to claim an elite status and ritual that they felt was only the proper due of the Marathas, and others interested much more in a direct attack on all forms of Brahman power. The differences between these were to emerge in the matter of ritual, as the former group sought to have Vedic ritual performed for themselves that seemed to the latter too similar for comfort to the Brahmanic forms of worship rejected by the society.

Conformity amongst members was another very delicate matter. There was nothing in the rules of the society that directly forbade the employment of Brahman priests.[25] Almost certainly, Phule and other leaders felt that this was too tricky an issue for direct legislation. The closest that the rules came to mentioning it was in the second article of the vow that members took on joining, where they undertook not to do anything which would undermine the idea of a basic religious equality, bestowed on all men by their Creator. As we shall see, however, not all members of the society seemed able to give such an uncompromising demonstration of their radicalism. This led to difficulties and tensions with others less cautious. Members often joined the society not as individuals but as families, and this made the problem of conformity more difficult. Often, the older members of the family resisted such dramatic religious innovation, and put pressure on their younger members not to go to the extreme of dispensing with Brahman priests altogether.

There was also conflict within the larger Mali and Marathi-*kunbi* communities in Pune, as the more conservative sections watched with trepidation the emergence of an organised body that threatened both established religious practices, and existing structures of authority within the castes. As we shall see, the emergence of a number of quite new institutions and organisations within the broader non-Brahman movement represented both a challenge to older caste authority, and the creation of quite different foci of power, for the control of which new leaders were to compete. The construction of new sources of power, with the ability to transcend older communities based on caste, provoked a fierce rivalry amongst non-Brahman leaders. This instability

25 It was only later that members of the Satyashodhak Samaj specifically undertook not to employ a Brahman priest or any other form of intermediary in the performance of ritual. Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan's recollections of the society, sent to P. S. Patil on 6 February 1928, set out these later principles of the society, which were probably decided early in the 1890s. Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan to P. S. Patil, Chinchavad, 6 February 1928, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

was quite disproportionate to the real ideological differences between them.

Another perennial problem that confronted the Satyashodhak Samaj lay in defining the exact status of its members in relation to the broader Hindu community. The question of whether or not they were still Hindus was a very awkward one, frequently seized on with glee by their opponents, and avoided as a clear decision by members themselves. Non-Hindus were free to join the society, which seemed to confirm the impression of separation from ordinary Hindus. While, however, the members of the society were reluctant to portray themselves as ordinary Hindus, they were even more anxious to avoid declaring that they had actually left the Hindu community.

We will turn now to look in more detail at the rituals and modes of worship employed by members of the society. These were of two kinds. The first were concerned with giving expression to the bonds of the new community, and conferring sanctity on these bonds by the invocation of divine power. The second were concerned with all of the normal ceremonial occasions in the lives of members, for which some new provision had to be made if Brahman priests were not employed. The first of these drew directly upon Phule's rewriting of important aspects of popular religious culture. In chapter 9, we saw how he imposed a new meaning on the figure of Khandoba, the guardian deity of western Maharashtra. 'Khandoba' had been the title given to the lieutenants of King Bali in pre-Aryan India. The rite of picking up the *tali* in Khandoba worship derived from King Bali's practice of throwing down a *vida*, or roll of betel leaves, to be picked up by whoever among his troops dared to take on a particularly difficult enterprise. At the time of taking their vows, new members of the Satyashodhak Samaj were called on to perform this rite of picking up the *tali*. Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan, who was a member of the society from its earliest days, recalled the rite:

> The materials for the tali were put into a brass dish: turmeric, red powder, pieces of sugar, fragments of coconut, coriander, betel leaves and betel nut. Whilst picking up the tali, he would take the names of Jotiba, Khandoba, Bahiroba and other gods, shouting 'Chang Bhala to Bahiri', 'Yelakot' and so on.[26]

Phule himself described Gyanoba Sasane's decision to become a member: 'After I had convinced him, Sasane picked up the vida and entered the Samaj.'[27] There are also references in the society's account book to the purchase of materials for the rite. On 22 October 1873 there

26 Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan to P. S. Patil, ibid.
27 *Satyadipika* (Marathi), June 1874.

were bought 'materials for the vida'. An entry for 23 February 1874 showed the purchase of coconut and turmeric, and small boxes to hold them. In the moment of the ritual, therefore, the new member became one with the most daring of King Bali's supporters, volunteering to take up the struggle against Brahman power.

The report of the society for 1873–5 described other changes in ritual:

> Some members of this Samaj and their families have given up a number of foolish religious customs. These are the fast at Haratalika; the celebrations for Ganesh Chaturthi on the fourth day of the light half of Bhadarapad; the rshipanchami; giving food to Brahmans, worshipping their feet and drinking the water touched by them, for the worship of ancestors in the dark half of Bhadarapad; and making a great noise at the celebration of the Holi fire on the fifteenth of the light half of Phalgun.[28]

The feast of Haratalika is on the third day of the light half of the month of Bhadarapad, and is the day of worship of the goddess Paravati, consort of Shiva, by married women. The following day, the fourth day of the light half of Bhadarapad, celebrates the birthday of the god Ganesh. The fifth day, *rshipanchami*, is devoted to the worship of the seven *rshis* or sages of ancient India. Some members, then, had clearly attempted to comply with the first article in the society's vows: to worship only one Supreme God. It is not clear whether any other forms of worship were substituted for these three days, which might have been linked with Phule's reinterpretations. For the fourth item, the worship of ancestors during the dark half of Bhadarapad, Phule had certainly provided a substitute meaning: it recalled the ceremonies carried out by the *Kshatriyas* of ancient India in honour of the dead killed in battle between Vaman and Bali. We do not have any evidence that this was used to replace the conventional ceremonies. Both the two reports of the society and the subsequent recollections of its members were understandably reticent about these details of its religious practices. In the society's account book, however, there is a brief but definite reference to the celebration of King Bali. The entry for 10 November 1874 registered 'Expenses for the feast of Bali Pratipada, the first day of the light half of Kartik'. This was the normal day, during the Hindu festival of Divali, for the worship of King Bali, but the account book did not usually record expenses for particular festival days. This was also one of the days that Phule had made the centrepiece of the struggle between Bali and Vaman. It seems very likely, therefore,

28 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1873 to 24 September 1875*, p. 4.

that the figure of Bali enjoyed a special place in the observances of the society in its early days.

We turn now to the conduct of more conventional ceremonies by the society. By far the most important of these was marriage. The report for 1873–5 took greatest pride in reporting the conduct of marriages without the aid of Brahman priests. Two such marriages had taken place in Pune, and eleven in the nearby village of Bhilar, conducted by the *patil* of the village, who had just become a member.[29] In introducing the subject of the marriages, the 1875 report criticised the extortionate demands of the Brahman priests at the marriages of *Shudras*, and the refusal of the former to carry out the ceremony in the proper fashion unless they were paid in full. The society had therefore determined to conduct its own ceremonies, without the assistance of Brahmans, to ensure that marriages were carried out in a proper fashion and without undue expense.[30]

Phule wrote a long account of one of the two Pune weddings, which was published in the *Satyadipika* newspaper. Phule's young friend, Gyanoba Sasane, then aged twenty-two, had arranged, with Phule's help, to marry Kashibai, the 14-year-old daughter of Narayanrao Vithoba Shinde, of Paravati village, near Pune. Phule persuaded Sasane to join the Satyashodhak Samaj, and to conduct the marriage according to the society's beliefs. Sasane's parents appealed to him to arrange a conventional wedding, but without success. Then, however, some of the conservatives in the Mali caste came out to Sasane's village of Hadapsar, and roused some of the villagers against this proposed assault upon their ancestral religion. They gathered at night outside Sasane's house, shouting threats and abuse. Sasane was greatly shaken by this, and went to Phule to tell him that he had changed his mind. Phule urged him to take courage and assured him that they were living under the protection of British justice, and Sasane returned to his former resolve. The opposition within the Mali caste continued, led, Phule said, by prominent members of a more conservative temperament, who feared that the society would undermine their authority. These opponents employed agents to visit Mali families to warn them that if they joined the society, they would have no choice but to become Christians. When Phule realised the extent of the opposition, he wrote to his fellow Satyashodhak, Rajanna Lingu, a Telugu Mali and well-known Pune lawyer. Lingu persuaded Gangaram Bhau Mhaske, a prominent public figure in Pune, and a well-wisher of the society, to arrange for police protection. The marriage went ahead according to

29 ibid., pp. 2–3. 30 ibid., p. 2.

plan, although the conservative Mali party arranged for the simultaneous marriages of two 2-year-old girls as a gesture of protest against the violation of Hindu beliefs.[31] Neither this account nor the 1875 report of the society, however, went into any detail about the content of these new ceremonies, or who actually conducted them.

This controversial religious initiative proved, at first, very difficult to sustain. Members were free to conduct their marriages and other important family ceremonies in the conventional manner, and it is clear that those who elected to have theirs done without Brahmans were a small minority. The second report of the society, for the year 1875–6, made no mention of marriages at all, but concentrated upon the programmes of education and social welfare carried out by the society. Indeed, references in this report suggest that there was a widespread reluctance among members to conform fully with the society's principles, particularly where the observance of caste differences and the conduct of ritual were concerned. The report opened by recording that 'Dr Vishram Ramji Gholay suggested that all members should try to begin to behave, as far as they were able, according to the rules that all members agreed to at the anniversary of the Society last year.'[32] Towards the end the report grew more explicit: 'It is not feasible for many of our people to conduct themselves according to the second clause of the ninth of the rules that were decided upon by the General Meeting of the Society last year. Accordingly, this rule has been lifted for the present year.' The fourth clause of the ninth rule was also to be removed since 'it was included in the third clause of the twenty-third rule'.[33] This ninth rule was the society's vow, and these alterations attenuated it severely, only a year after the members had agreed upon it. Most important was the suspension of the crucial second clause of the vow, in which members committed themselves not to observe social and religious inequalities. Very shortly after its foundation, therefore, the leaders of the society found that they would have to make compromises to allow for their less venturesome followers.

Conflict and the problem of leadership

Within three years of its foundation, the society encountered equally severe problems amongst its leadership. As a new focus of power and organisation, it was natural that the society should meet with some hostility from existing leaders within the Mali and Maratha-*kunbi*

31 *Satyadipika*, June 1874.
32 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1875 to 24 September 1876*, p. 1.
33 ibid., p. 8.

communities. However, struggles for leadership within the society proved just as damaging. The most violent of these struggles took place between Phule and Krshnarao Bhalekar, the young radical from the village of Bhamburade. It began in 1875, and continued sporadically right up until Phule's death in 1890. The immediate object of the dispute was the control of a printing press that had been given to the Pune society by two wealthy members of the Bombay branch, Vyanku Baloji Kalevar and Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru. The deeper issue was Phule's personal authority within the society.

In these first three years of its existence, Phule does not seem to have played a very prominent formal role in the society's affairs. It is not clear who was first made President. In the report of 1875, Phule appeared as the society's Treasurer, while in 1876 he acted only as one of the twelve members on the managing committee, with the offices of president and vice-president going to Vishram Ramji Gholay and Laksmanrao Hari Shinde respectively. It is very difficult to find direct references to the extent of his informal authority within the society. What is clear, however, is that he was able both to withold control of the printing press from Bhalekar, and to suppress all reference to the dispute in the society's reports. It is only from Bhalekar's later comments that we learn of the bitterness that the dispute aroused. Unfortunately, we have only Bhalekar's account of the quarrel, and no explanation on Phule's side for his refusal to allow Bhalekar to carry out his plan to use the press to start what would have been the first non-Brahman newspaper. The society's account book recorded the arrival of the printing press from Bombay on 24 November 1874. It had cost Rs 1,200, and its purpose was 'that we should publish before our compassionate English Government what the aims of the society are, and what difficulties and troubles the Shudra people suffer from the Brahman servants of the Government'.[34] Thereafter, from November 1874 until January 1876, the account book recorded a good deal of money being spent on the accommodation and maintenance of the press, but it was never brought into operation. An entry for 5 January 1876 listed the expenses of packing the press up. Only a week later, on 12 January, the society had got in an outside contractor for the printing of 1,000 copies of its rules. The report for 1875–6 remarked only that 'for about a year there has been correspondence between members here and in Bombay over the rights to the press, and so they have taken it back'.[35]

34 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1873 to 24 September 1875*, p. 4.

35 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1875 to 24 September 1876*, p. 6.

Bhalekar gave a more impassioned account of the affair. After the press had arrived, it had merely lain idle, while members had worried about the problem of libel that might arise from conducting a non-Brahman newspaper. Seeing their reluctance, Bhalekar declared that he would take on the responsibility of running a newspaper, and asked for the press to be rented to him. Most of the members were in favour of the idea, having been impressed with Bhalekar's already considerable record of activity on behalf of the lower castes. 'But the gentleman who was responsible for allowing the press to lie idle for two years disagreed. He did not like the idea that this young lad might become more important, and make him appear timid and incompetent. So he raised all sorts of objections before the society, and in the end returned the press to Bombay.'[36] Undeterred, Bhalekar set about acquiring his own press with the help of a Bombay supporter, Muktaji Appaji Kambale. He brought it to Pune, and in January 1877 brought out the first issue of the weekly *Din Bandhu* newspaper, with a circulation of 300 copies.

There is no evidence that Phule refused to allow Bhalekar to conduct a newspaper for reasons of ideological disagreement. Throughout his career, Bhalekar's position on the crucial issues of religion and caste remained very close to Phule's. The dispute was rather an illustration of the difficulties of leadership that were caused by the intensely oppositional nature of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and its novelty as a focus of power. Phule had striven, often in the face of bitter opposition, to maintain a consistent platform of resistance to Brahman power. He had made considerable personal sacrifices in the course of the struggle, beginning with his banishment from his father's house, with a young wife and few resources of his own. The stresses and privations of such a position, kept up for more than twenty-five years, almost certainly made Phule possessive of his leadership. Bhalekar, then aged twenty-six years to Phule's fifty, had already demonstrated considerable intellectual independence and capacity for organisation. He himself remarked on his own irreverence and liking for argument. At Phule's first visit to his village of Bhamburade in 1867, Bhalekar had shown no hesitation in getting up and criticising his speech: 'In order to show up the mistakes in what he said (I was young at the time, and had a great liking for argument) I got up and made a speech of my own.'[37] Phule may have felt that the purposes of the society would be served better by preserving a strong and united leadership than by allowing a major new initiative on the part of such a determinedly independent and enthusias-

36 Krshnarao Bhalekar, *A short history of Krshnarao Bhalekar*, Bhalekar MSS, Dr R. M. Patil Collection, Pune.

37 Krshnarao Bhalekar, MS entitled *Utterances at the time of his death* (Marathi), unpaginated. Bhalekar MSS, Dr R. M. Patil Collection, Pune.

tic member. The amounts of money that were spent on the press, ultimately to no purpose, aggravated feelings on either side.

Phule's decision did not resolve the problem of authority in the society. Bhalekar himself remained loyal to its larger aims, but never lost his resentment of Phule, and his sense of grievance at the lack of appreciation shown towards his considerable efforts. Bhalekar's alienation led to the loss of some of the society's impetus. In 1878, and again in 1879, he organised debating competitions on his own initiative. An announcement in the *Dnyanodaya* newspaper of 28 February 1878 gave notice of the first of these: 'The undersigned humbly beg to inform all members of the Satyashodhak Samaj that some wise members wish to hold a competition for the reading and writing of essays, on 10 March 1878, according to the rules of our Society, that our people should learn to read and write fluently.' There is no indication that the society itself organised a competition after 1877.

There were other signs, muted and indirect, of restiveness amongst some of the members. Certainly, several were not unwilling to support Bhalekar in his efforts. Ramasheth Bapusheth Uravane and Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan were co-signatories of the letter to the *Dnyanodaya*. Another member, Dadji Sakharam Chavan, put his name to the announcement of the 1879 competition, given in the *Dnyanodaya* of 13 March 1879. In 1877 the president of the society, Dr Vishram Ramji Gholay, resigned, according to Bhalekar because he found it hard to work with Phule.[38] The report of the society for 1875–6 also gave indications that all was not well. The secretary, Narayan Tukaram Nagarakar, praised the work that members had done. But there was still a great need for support from intelligent, wealthy, and hard-working people. 'While the numbers of such people in the society do not increase, and while the members that there are do not attend the society regularly, it will not flourish as it should. Every member should be quite clear about this. The society has taken in hand a work of very great importance, but the work is not going ahead as fast as we would have wished.'[39] Another indication of flagging enthusiasm was that only 67 people are recorded in this report as paying any kind of subscription, against a claimed membership of 316. The society had Rs 766 in its funds at the time, but most of this was contributed by a few of the wealthier members, and by Phule himself.[40]

38 Krshnarao Bhalekar, MS notebook, unpaginated, Bhalekar MSS, Dr R. M. Patil Collection, Pune.

39 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1875 to 24 September 1876*, p. 8.

40 The second report of the society contains a list of members and well-wishers who had contributed to its funds during the year, and a summary of its financial condition.

The problem of authority in the society was not alone in causing this loss of unity and energy towards the end of the decade. Equally important was the resistance that it encountered amongst the very Mali and Maratha-*kunbi* castes whose cause it claimed to champion. This emerged clearly in a letter written to Bhalekar's *Din Bandhu* newspaper by Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, a rising young member of the society in Bombay. The Satyashodhak Samaj and its progenitor, Jotirao Phule, had taken up the important work of giving education to the *Shudras*, and striving to improve their condition. However, Lokhande said, wealthy and influential *Shudras* had not given Phule the support that he deserved. This was because they took a very poor view of Phule's hostility to Brahmans. But, Lokhande continued:

> My brothers, you are making a great mistake. The fashion for calling themselves Brahmans that these people have taken up is absolutely against the Shastras, and so they commit a great sin in the eyes of God. To you, a Brahman is your guru in religion, and we revere him more than God himself. Therefore, he should look on you as a parent would his child. But this is not at all the case. These Brahmans do not make haste, in the way that you would, to help your child out of difficulty. On the contrary, they strive to increase your troubles. In some villages, Brahmans have seized the property of the Shudras and made them homeless and destitute. So, my friends, are you not making a mistake?[41]

Despite all these difficulties, the leaders of the Satyashodhak Samaj had succeeded, against formidable odds, in laying down a precedent for non-Brahman organisation. Both the tradition of organised radicalism instituted by the society, and the experience of planning a common venture, were to be extremely valuable in the future.

The membership of the early Satyashodhak Samaj

In this early stage of its existence, the society drew its support from Pune and its immediately adjacent villages, and from Bombay. Very often, however, members had only moved to Pune and Bombay within one or two generations. The leaders of the society were Mali or Telugu Mali by caste. Malis also made up a large proportion of its support, although a very wide range of castes was represented within the membership. A high proportion of the most prominent members were engaged in commerce as merchants and contractors, and often formed business connections in addition to their common ideological commitments. A considerable number were also employed in local government administration, or had a profession.

41 This letter from Lokhande to the *Din Bandhu* was reprinted in the *Dnyanodaya* of 13 September 1877.

We will look first at a few of the more prominent members, about whom we have most information. Narayan Meghaji Lokhande (1848–1907) ranked alongside Phule and Bhalekar as a Satyashodhak campaigner and polemicist. He was the son of a poor Mali from Thana district. After a secondary school education, he went to work in Bombay as a clerk in a railway office, then in a post office, and finally as a store-keeper in a cotton mill.[42] He joined the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1874. He undertook extensive organisational activity from the late 1870s, concerning himself especially with the condition of workers in the cotton mills in Bombay. Early in 1880, he founded the Mill Hands Association, which agitated for shorter working hours and better conditions for labourers. He wrote prolifically in the *Din Bandhu* newspaper, which he took over as editor from Bhalekar in May 1880. Lokhande's work contained an important difference of ideological emphasis from that of Phule and Bhalekar. The latter had always remained wary of making direct claims to a Maratha status for the lower castes. Lokhande showed no such hesitation in laying claim to the Maratha name. As editor of the *Din Bandhu*, he made it a central ideological project to identify the Maratha name with all of Maharashtra's agricultural and labouring castes. He spent much editorial energy in denigrating rival interpretations – either that the name should be applied only to the Maratha-*kunbis*, or that all Marathi-speaking Hindus might claim the title.

Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru was another important activist and polemicist during the 1870s. He was one of the Telugu Mali community in Bombay who made up a large proportion of the society's Bombay support.[43] Ayyavaru was a wealthy contractor, with a strong interest in social and religious reform. He took the lead in forming the Bombay branch of the society and, with Vyanku Baloji Kalevar, another Telugu Mali contractor, purchased the ill-fated printing press. He founded an institute for women in Bombay, and was active in the Nitiprasarak Mandali, founded in 1882, which contained many members of the society, and which strove to spread ideas of moral reform without bias towards any existing religion. Ayyavaru and Phule came into conflict when the former published a pamphlet, entitled *A request to our Christian brothers*, which reproached Christians for their aggressive

42 D. Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley*, p. 157.

43 The Telugu Malis, or Kamathi Puris, were a small community, mainly concentrated in Bombay, Thana, and the western Deccan. They had come to the Bombay Presidency early in the century from Hyderabad and Madras. They spoke Telugu and Marathi. As a caste, they ranked closely with Maharashtra's Malis, and carried out a very similar range of occupations: fruit and vegetable cultivation, labouring, and trading and contracting in the towns.

claims to a monopoly of religious truth.[44] However, Ayyavaru remained consistently loyal to the broader aims of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and carried its traditions of activism into the next century.

Vishram Ramji Gholay (1838–1900), the president of the society in 1875–6, was of the *gavali* caste, and came of a family with a strong tradition of service in the Maratha armies. His grandfathers had been the commanders of the fort of Anjanavel, and his father had entered the army as a *Subedhar*, or Indian officer, under British rule. He went to Grant Medical College in Bombay, and came to Pune as an assistant surgeon in 1874, and joined the society. He was a very generous contributor to the society's funds for educational projects. He made great efforts on the society's behalf throughout the 1880s, assisting at the reception given to Sayajirao, the Maharaja of Baroda, giving advice when members from Otur, in Junnar district, were taken to court by the village Brahmans for having conducted their own marriage ceremonies, and attending on Phule when he became ill in 1888.

We turn now to the composition of the larger membership of the society. A number of members were employed in the administration and the professions. A list of sixty-seven members given at the back of the report for 1875–6 included four doctors, two 'head writers', two 'writers', a head clerk, a police inspector, a Deputy Collector, an overseer, and a government pensioner.[45] Other lists of members give some indication of their occupations.[46] Hanumanrao Bapuji Sahane, Narayan Tukaram Nagarakar, Nana Karkhanavis, Narayanrao Kadalak, Vinayak Babaji Dengale, and Namadev Mahadev Dasturakar all returned themselves as 'writers', or clerks in private employment. Muraraji Vithoba Musil was a clerk in a local government department. Bapuji Hari Shinde was a head accountant in the government service at Buldhana. Rajanna Lingu, a Telugu Mali, was a prominent lawyer in Pune. Yashavantrao Raghoba Kambale was a railway inspector. Gyanu Jayakar was a *Jamadar*, or commander of troops in the Bombay army. Viththal Tulsiram Hirave was a soldier stationed in Pune. There was also a sprinkling of students. Vinayakrao Babaji was a matriculation candidate. Dayaram Kirad was a matriculation student receiving aid from the society because of the poverty of his family. Tukaram Chavan went to engineering college, paid for by the society.

An even larger proportion of members were merchants, traders, and

44 Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru, *A request to our Christian brothers*, Bombay 1887.

45 *The Report of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj, from 24 September 1875 to 24 September 1876*, pp. 9–10.

46 This and the following information about the occupations of Satyashodhak members is taken from the two reports of the society, its MS account book, and from a list of members given in the *Satyadipika* newspaper of June 1875.

contractors. Most of the Telugu Mali members in Bombay came into this category. Jaya Karadi Lingu, Vyanku Baloji Kalevar, Narasinha Sayabu Vadnala, Nagu Sayaji, and Devaji Ellapa were all Bombay merchants and contractors who contributed substantially to the society's funds, and took its programmes of education and religious reform to their own communities. Mali members in Pune included a number of prominent merchants and contractors. Ramasheth Bapusheth Uravane was a wealthy merchant, trading in sugar, and a close friend of Phule's. Ramachandra Hari Shinde, on the managing committee of the society in 1875, was a contractor, in business for a time with Bhalekar in the company set up by Phule, called the Pune Commercial and Contracting Company. Babaji Manaji Dengale was a Pune trader. Gyanu Malharaji Jagade of Pune, and Gopal Manaske of Bhamburade were *mestres*, superintendents of labourers in construction projects.

Although Malis made up the largest part of the membership, other castes were represented. Bhikoba Baloba Sali and Tukaram Bahiroba Sali were of the Sali or weaver caste. Ravaji bin Balaji Jadhav and Sakhu Bapu Mahar were of the untouchable Mahar caste. Damodar Bapuji Shimpi and Sadguru Bhivaji Shimpi were of the Shimpi caste of tailors. Dhondiram Namadev Kumbhar, who was to become a formidable polemicist of the society, was a potter or bricklayer. Raju Baba was of the Vanjari caste of grain-carriers. There were two Muslims, Ajjam Elija Shaleman, and Babanabhai Musulman. Govindrao Bapuji Patil, of Bhilar village in the Satara district, was a Maratha-*kunbi*.

The society was dominated, then, by well-to-do merchants, tradesmen, and professional men, but also attracted poorer and more obscure Mali families, as well as a small number of members from other castes. They found the society, and its accompanying ideology, attractive for several different reasons. First, and most obviously, they experienced the sense of incongruity almost always felt by a newly urbanised and upwardly mobile group. In secular terms, they occupied a position of affluence and local respectability, but their low ritual status, as *Shudras*, remained unchanged. This sense of disparity was heightened by the publicity that was given to the actual contents of Hindu religious texts, especially those that specified the very low ritual status of *Shudras*, such as Manu's Laws. Such discrepancies were by no means unusual in Hindu society, as individual castes flourished and declined. An adjustment of ritual position was usually possible in some form of Sanskritisation. Yet the intellectual climate in Pune and Bombay was characterised by a public hostility to older Brahman models of behaviour, and by intense debate about individual and social values. This meant that some means of expressing a greater social respectability, as an alternative to Sanskritisation, would find a ready response.

Another factor in the attractiveness of Satyashodhak ideas for these groups derived from their close personal experience of the advantages enjoyed by Brahmans in the local institutions of British administration. As contractors and professional men dealing very frequently with local government institutions, they came into close contact with Brahman officials and administrators. This would have magnified both their conviction of the economic and social advantages enjoyed by Brahmans, and their feeling of an undue dependence on them. Besides them, the Malis and other lower castes seemed woefully lacking in the ability to secure such rewards. The most likely way to acquire this ability lay in organisation, not just of the Malis, but of all lower castes. This reflected the conviction of a connection between the religious and the administrative and occupational power of Brahmans that came to stand at the very heart of Satyashodhak ideology. Members of the society were convinced that only a very broadly-based movement would be able to persuade the British government that it did itself, and society as a whole, a great disservice in directing so many educational and occupational advantages towards Brahmans. Such a body would be able to claim with conviction that these benefits should be directed towards the great bulk of Maharashtra's cultivating and labouring castes, the real substance of her society, and the representatives of her history and culture.

Both of these concerns came together in giving great appeal to Phule's *Kshatriya* ideology, set out in the works that were adopted as Satyashodhak texts. For these early supporters of the Samaj, the idea that their 'real' identity was that of the dispossessed *Kshatriyas* of ancient India served the social and religious purpose that might otherwise have been met by the claim to a higher conventional ritual status, and by a change in social practices towards a Brahmanic model of behaviour. There was also a strong political dimension to the assertion of *Kshatriya* status. As we saw in chapter 3, Pratapsinh Bhosale's insistence on his status as a *Kshatriya* was nothing less than a claim to the position of secular authority that belonged to a kingly ruler. It represented an assertion of his own leadership of Hindu society against what he saw as a Chitpavan Brahman effort simultaneously to usurp his secular authority, and to undermine its religious legitimation by consigning the Bhosales to the ranks of the *Shudras*. In asserting an original *Kshatriya* status for all lower castes, now withheld by conventional Brahmanic religion, Phule and his urban following in the 1870s made the deliberate link with this political dimension of traditional Maratha claims to a *Kshatriya* ritual status. Lacking the obvious genealogical basis for their arguments that Pratapsinh possessed, they

made their claim in the context of the larger argument that the virtues of the warrior and the cultivator had been the central force in the shaping of Maharashtra's traditions and culture. To their representatives in nineteenth-century society belonged the position of social and political leadership that Brahmans had assumed, and upon which the latter had consolidated their hold under British rule. These representatives were the peasant and urban lower castes, the true *Kshatriyas* of nineteenth-century Maharashtra.

This immediately prompts the question as to what connection the lives of merchants and contractors, urbanised and relatively affluent, could have possessed with these elements in Maharashtra's traditional society and culture to give the identification with the warrior and the cultivator any real meaning. Yet there were two vital links. First, as Malis, they did belong to the large body of Maharashtra's cultivator castes with which these traditional occupations were associated, and the period of their urbanisation was relatively short. Secondly, the very nature of their occupations as merchants and contractors meant that they maintained their contact both with the urban environment in which their awareness of injustice was sharpened, and with these aspects of traditional culture in rural society.

This essential duality of the early support of the Satyashodhak Samaj is beautifully illustrated in an anecdote about Phule told by his friend and business colleague, Gyanoba Sasane. Sasane had accompanied Phule to inspect his orchards outside Pune. When all the workers had stopped for their mid-day meal, Phule got up and started to drive the well-bucket himself, singing as he did so. The labourers laughed to see him, whereupon Phule turned to explain. He was just a cultivator in his bones, he said. What was more, all plain cultivators sang at their work. It was only those who did not toil with their hands that had the leisure to sit with musical instruments. The real cultivator had to make his music as he worked.[47]

47 Gyanoba Sasane to P. S. Patil, Hadapsar, 27 May 1930, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

PART 6

Ideology and the non-Brahman movement in the 1880s

15
Phule's polemic in the 1880s: the ideological construction of rural life and labour

Introduction

The predominantly Mali leadership of the Satyashodhak Samaj employed Phule's polemic in an attempt to capture the mass constituency of Maharashtra's agricultural and labouring castes. The social position of the Mali caste had done much to make this attempt at leadership possible. The Malis were close enough to the larger Maratha-*kunbi* complex to enable them to make a convincing claim to an identity of social, economic, and cultural interest. Yet the leaders of the caste had sufficient contact with the urban centres to give them access to new ideas of social and religious reform, and were wealthy enough to possess the leisure and resources necessary for radical activity. However, the Mali leadership ran up against two obstacles. The lack of co-operation resulted in internal dissention in the fledgling organisation, and there was resistance to some aspects of Satyashodhak ideology amongst the very *Shudra* communities whose support they hoped to capture. The first difficulty needed an accumulation of experience. The second was to find a partial resolution, led by Phule, in a new surge of organisational and polemical activity from the early 1880s.

In the period immediately following the leadership problems of 1876–7, Phule turned his energies in a different direction. Between 1876 and 1882 he served on the committee of the Pune Municipality, where members were nominated by the Bombay government. As a Commissioner, he maintained a practical concern with the welfare of the lower castes. He pressed for proper roads to be laid in the old part of Pune city. He was the only one of the thirty-six members of the Muncipality to vote against a proposition to spend money on decorating the city for the visit of Lord Lytton in 1880, arguing that the money would be better spent on the education of poor citizens. He also resisted the Bombay government's decision to open new liquor shops in Pune on the grounds that this would exacerbate the problem of drunkenness in the city.[1] In 1882, Phule gave evidence before the Hunter Commis-

1 A longer account of Phule's activities as a member of the Municipality is in D. Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 160–4.

sion, then appointed to report on India's educational needs. Phule's evidence, amounting to several typed pages, asked for greater State resources to be devoted to primary education, which should be made compulsory up to the age of twelve. Higher education, to which the government of Bombay had already devoted very generous resources, might be far better left to the efforts of private individuals.[2]

In the same period, Phule's business interests flourished. He established himself in Pune as an efficient and successful contractor, supplying building materials for a number of very large construction projects undertaken by the Bombay government: the Khadakavasala dam, the Yeravada bridge, and the tunnel at Katraj *ghat* on the Pune–Satara road. Phule employed many hundreds of labourers on these projects, which turned out to be extremely profitable. Even so, he lost no opportunity of demonstrating his concern for the lower castes. Gyanoba Sasane, whom Phule employed as a *mestre*, or supervisor of labourers, on the Khadakavasala and Yeravada constructions, reported that he opened a night school which was attended by the 2,000 labourers in his employment. When the projects were finished, he gave a feast for them all. It was a much greater virtue, he said, to feed those who toiled and sweated for a living, than to give feasts for Brahmans. Sasane also described how, during the great famine of 1877, when Phule was carrying out work mining for stone at Golhe, he and other Mali contractors opened a famine relief camp for children and the sick and disabled at Dhanakavadi.[3]

Phule's agricultural concerns also flourished in this period. Govind Ganapat Kale, the son of Ganapatrao Kale, whose fields lay adjacent to Phule's land just outside Pune, recalled that Phule had undertaken to construct a channel from the Khadakavasala dam to carry water to irrigate this cultivated area. The other landowners were afraid to use the water, fearing that it would spoil the soil, or that it was a government plot to seize their land. Phule took the lead, and demonstrated how irrigation could make the soil bloom all the year round. He grew all kinds of fruit and vegetables, and also laid down about 15 acres of sugar-cane from which he made a profitable business extracting the raw sugar. Eventually, other landowners followed suit. Phule was rather less successful with another venture, the Pune Commercial and Contracting Company, set up to carry fruit and vegetables to Bombay.[4]

2 *The Education Commission, Bombay Presidency*, Calcutta 1884, vol. II, pp. 140–5, reprinted in D. Keer and S. G. Malshe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule*, Bombay 1969, pp. 168–81.

3 Gyanoba Sasane to P. S. Patil, Hadapsar, 27 May 1930, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

4 Govind Ganapat Kale to P. S. Patil, Hadapsar, 21 November 1940, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

From 1882, Phule and his colleagues attempted to extend the activities of the Satyashodhak Samaj to the rural areas in the Pune, Ahmadnagar, and Thana Collectorates and beyond. This move brought Phule the polemicist into a more sustained and direct contact with the communities of *kunbi* cultivators. This contact resulted in a subtle shift of emphasis in his writing. His earlier assumptions of the illegitimacy of all forms of Brahman power remained. The focus of his attack moved, however, to a vividly drawn contrast between all those who made their living in clerical, professional, and religious pursuits, and the great mass of people who toiled daily to provide the material support for all classes. Phule talked less of a movement of *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras*, and attempted to identify the combined aims of the Satyashodhak Samaj – religious reform and lower caste education and uplift – more centrally with the rural masses of the Maratha-*kunbi* caste complex. These *shetakari* cultivators were the producers and sustainers of Maharashtrian society. They, more than any other group, could claim to make up its real substance and to provide its natural leaders. Phule depicted this contrast between those who laboured and those who merely consumed by the slow and painstaking compilation of every detail of the cultivators' existence. His speeches and writings in this period constituted one of the most elaborate and minutely observed pieces of social reporting of agricultural life in the Bombay Presidency. Cumulatively, this detail had enormous effect. It provided a criterion of social value concerning the distribution of social and economic resources in society, and drew attention to the injustice of a community that reserved its greatest rewards for those furthest from the productive process.

Phule also used this contrast to suggest the real unity of all those who labour on the land. Such unity flowed from the shared participation in the experiences of rural life and labour, the close involvement with the agricultural cycle, the intense physical toil and frequent hardship borne in common with the whole village community. These were experiences that at once bound them together and set them apart from social groups that depended upon others for their material support. In his descriptions, Phule literally conjured up for the rural audiences at Satyashodhak gatherings a vivid vision of their own toiling lives. He created, in this picture of honest labour and shared hardship, a powerful symbol for the attraction of common loyalty, and implied a sect of social values that emphasised the honesty and co-operativeness of relations within the community, as opposed to the selfishness that characterised the attitudes of Brahman castes. This now stood alongside Phule's earlier attempt to anchor his polemic to the processes of upward

social mobility already at work in the Maratha-*kunbi* complex, and to give conviction to the appeal for unity through the revelation of a 'hidden' *Kshatriya* identity.

In this way Phule turned his attention towards what was to become one of the most sought-after ideological prizes in the politics of the Presidency. This was the ability to make a convincing claim to act as the real spokesman of the rural communities, of the masses of cultivators and labourers who lived in Maharashtra's villages. It was the capacity to assert a special knowledge of their interests and demands, and to turn this into a claim of special authority that might be used in the effort to influence and bargain with the government. Last and not least, it was the polemical ability to attack the same assertions made by rival groups, and to dismiss them as rooted in deception and self-interest. Most notably, of course, the Sarvajanik Sabha and its organisational predecessors had taken upon themselves the task of reporting agrarian conditions, and of representing rural grievances to the Bombay government. Phule's public polemic from 1882 set out to refute the claims of the Sabha to understand the plight of the rural communities, and to represent their wishes. His analysis offered quite a different view of the causes of rural poverty, and the necessary role of the government in alleviating it.

It was in Junnar Taluka, some 60 miles directly north of Pune, that Satyashodhak campaigning found its first large rural response. The link with Junnar Taluka was provided by Bhau Kondaji Patil, whose family held rights to the *patilki* of the small town of Otur, in Junnar. Bhau Kondaji Patil, born in 1828, left home at the age of fifteen as a result of a family quarrel and went to Bombay. After considerable hardship, he found a job with a merchant, working by day and studying by night, and was eventually able to save enough to open a small shop. In 1867 he returned to Otur, worked for two or three years on the *patil*-ship, then moved to Gwalior State where he was quickly promoted to Mamledar. He remained there for ten years, but we do know that early in 1874 he visited the Satyashodhak Samaj in Pune.[5] He returned from Gwalior to Otur in 1882 and shortly afterwards visited Phule in Pune, where he joined the Satyashodhak Samaj.[6] From 1882, Phule, Patil, and other leaders of the Samaj toured these rural areas, addressing large meetings

5 An entry in the society's account book for the Hindu date 5 Phalgun 1795 (corresponding to 21 February 1874), records the expenses for entertainments and garlands for Bhau Kondaji. P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur. There is no record of his having become a member at this point.

6 This information about Patil is taken from a letter written by his son: Govind Bhau Patil Dumare to P. S. Patil, Otur, 26 May 1939, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

of cultivators, and helping to organise a boycott of Brahmans and moneylenders. Between 1882 and 1883 Phule wrote a series of speeches and lectures that were read out on these occasions. He then collected all these into a single manuscript work of five long chapters in order to present a copy to the Earl of Dufferin, the Governor-General of India. This work was entitled *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord.*[7] The first two chapters were published serially in the *Din Bandhu* newspaper, by 1883 under the editorship of Narayan Meghaji Lokhande. To Phule's annoyance, Lokhande refused to publish the last three chapters on the grounds that they were severely critical of British government policy towards the cultivators, and might land the paper in trouble.[8] The book remained unpublished during Phule's lifetime.[9] It is, nevertheless, an invaluable testimony to the dual direction of Satyashodhak efforts in this period. The work was intended to influence British policy, presenting a plain statement of the real conditions and needs of the rural communities, and Phule chose the simple device of sending a copy direct to the Governor-General. At the same time the work was aimed at the rural audiences of the Satyashodhak Samaj.

Labour and loyalty in the community of cultivators

Phule took great pains to project precisely the details of material life, and of a range of social and economic concerns, with which a rural audience could identify. He devoted the fourth chapter of *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, 'The state of agriculture and of the cultivators today', to exactly this kind of polemical representation. He personalised his account, presenting it in the words of an imaginary cultivator beset with the difficulties of acute poverty and indebtedness. We are introduced to him as he leaves the Collector's tent, which is pitched in comfort in a shady mango grove on the bank of a river, biting his lips in anger and frustration after the Collector has been too absorbed in his tea and his mid-day meal to give proper consideration to his request for an easier arrangement for the payment of his land cess. It is worth noting that Phule never attributed to him the sort of complete social abasement and

7 The Marathi word *Asud*, a 'whip' is rather difficult to translate, since it refers specifically to the very long whip used by the ploughman. Here, I have adopted the translation 'Whip-Cord' used by Phule himself in the English sub-title to the work.

8 *Din Bandhu*, 28 October 1883, quoted in Y. D. Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar: Kahi Anubandh*, Pune 1979, pp. 52–3.

9 The original manuscript of the work is in the National Library of Calcutta. It was first published in 1967, edited by Keer and Malshe. A copy of this first edition is in the University Library, Cambridge. All references to the work here, however, are taken from Keer and Malshe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*.

inhuman material deprivation that he used to describe the conditions of the untouchable castes. The cultivator was certainly very hard up, having run out of temporary expedients for meeting the demands of creditors and revenue officials, and this long-drawn-out impoverishment had left its mark on his house, family, and livestock. But it is clear that he had once been a man of moderate substance as cultivators went, and that his determination and self-respect were only now beginning to show signs of wearing out. This emphasis reflected the slight shift away from a unity for the lower castes derived from a common historical experience and made explicit in the inclusion of untouchable castes, and towards a solidarity set within a narrower conception of the 'community of the oppressed', and deriving from shared social experiences.

We follow the cultivator to his house, where he has his meal and lies down to sleep: in vain, however, as his mind starts to fill with thoughts of all his difficulties. These had started when, unlike the other villagers, he had failed to bribe the Brahman official in charge of the revenue assessment, and so the latter had recorded his lands at a greatly increased cess. In the very same year, there was a shortage of rain and all his crops suffered; at the same time, his father had died. The expense of his father's funeral had meant that he had had to borrow from the Brahman moneylender enough to pay that year's cess, and his lands had been pledged against the debt. The moneylender had charged him such a rate of interest that he had been unable to meet the payments, and the Brahman had foreclosed on the debt. It was hopeless for the cultivator to fight the case in court, since the moneylender, the revenue officials, the Collector's staff, the court officials, and the head of the local police were all related to one another, or were caste-follows as Brahmans. The following year he had managed by selling the jewellery of the women in the house, and since then he had borrowed every year from the *maravadi*, the moneylender, in the village,[10] who had also brought cases against him that had lingered in the local courts for years, despite the money spent on bribes to extricate them. He had even resorted to selling his married daughter's jewellery, so that her father-in-law would no longer have her in the house. His mind then turns to the immediate needs of his smallholding: the new leather bucket required for the irrigated land to prevent further dehydration of the sugar crop, the ruin of the maize crop because it was not harvested on time, the weakness of the livestock from lack of food, the embarrassment of the family at going about in clothes too tattered to cover them.

10 *Maravadis* were immigrants to Maharashtra from the Maravad area in the north of Gujurat, and specialised in corn-trading and moneylending.

In his mind, he turns over the alternatives that are left: if he sold the bullocks, there would be no way of ploughing next year. It was impossible for him to take up a trade because he could not read or write. If they sold up and left their land, he had no skill that would enable him to earn a living elsewhere.

Phule maintained the personal atmosphere in the account, now becoming the observer: 'At last, heaving a great sigh in the midst of his tears, the cultivator fell asleep. I wiped my own eyes, and went to look outside.' This was followed by a most vivid description of the cultivator's house and smallholding, and again the most familiar elements of the social and domestic life of any rural popular audience were recounted and given a strong polemical twist. Phule described the courtyard filled with broken implements, piles of dung, and swept-up rubbish; the storage jars for grain empty and fallen over; the makeshift cowpen with its few thin and mangy inhabitants; a stray dog wandering around, and swarms of flies attracted by the excrement. In the corner, a young woman sat making dung-cakes for fuel, with her legs caked in dirt; an old woman lay on the floor amidst refuse from vegetables, with a baby near by crying continually and sending a trickle of water across the floor. Older children, with running noses and sores on their skin, played games in the mud and filth. The inside of the house portrayed the same gradual slide into squalor and poverty, and the sheer loss of will that accompanied it: the dirty oven, with milk spilt around it, and the ashes beneath mixed with excrement from the cat; the walls stained red with betel nut juice and blackened by smoke; the niches in the wall holding leaky stone lamps; old bits of food covered with flies; a pair of worn-out sandals and some old underwear; the dust and cobwebs everywhere. Phule concluded the description here, as the cultivator's aged mother entered, bewailing her family's destitution, and cursing the different kinds of Brahman power that had emerged and reinforced one another within the framework of British rule, from the Brahman priest to the Brahman revenue official, to bring honest families to their knees.[11]

The acute poverty of the cultivator, whose labour supplied all the material needs of society, were contrasted vividly with the relatively leisured and prosperous lives of Brahmans in the employ of the British government. Phule described the meagre diet of the cultivator: the cold leftovers in the morning livened up with a little chutney, the *bhakaris* with watery lentil *dal* in the afternoon, and the broken grains of maize or *jondhali* in the evening. When even these failed, the cultivator filled

11 Jotirao Phule, *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 233–9.

himself up with green mangoes, figs, and tamarind, or whatever came to hand in the fields as he went out to pick up the plough. Phule followed this with a description of a rich Brahman wedding feast, with its special pavilion lit up by electric lights, its extravagant array of rich dishes, and the distribution of *daksina* to Brahmans afterwards. He appealed to the women in his audience, contrasting their own toil alongside their husbands in the fields with the life of ease that Brahman women led:

These Brahman women sleep on late in the morning, get up at leisure and do their hair; sweep and wash their houses and do a bit of cooking and washing, and then sit around all day listening to old religious tales and puranas being read to them.

This led on to a bitter attack on the distribution of social and economic resources in society:

The cultivators feel so ashamed of their poverty that they hesitate to invite the agents of the government and the governor even to take betel nut at their functions. But is it right that he, whose labour provides for the armies of the government, the revenue from liquor, for the disproportionate amounts of leisure that are enjoyed by the British officials, and for the inflated pay and pensions and the affectations of ritual purity of the Indian officials, are not even paid this minimum of respect? What can we say when we see that these people often don't even get enough bread to fill their bellies, or clothes to cover their bodies, as they suffer the harsh strokes of government taxes, when we see them reduced to such misery that even the Saheb's hunting dog shrinks away from them?[12]

Besides their labour, the community of cultivators also represented the value of co-operation and honesty and fair dealing to others. This derived from the simple interdependence of rural communities, and the spirit of mutual sympathy created by shared social experiences. Phule accompanied this by a demand that administrative institutions at the local level, suitably reformed, should be filled from rural society at large, rather than from literate elites whose immediate interests as a social group were quite different from those of the cultivators who composed the bulk of the local population. This quality of the rural community emerged in a conversation that Phule reported having held with a visitor. The visitor, who answered Phule's question as to his caste with the claim that he was 'a real Maratha', asked Phule how he could be so sure that if the Brahmans at the local level of administration were replaced with cultivators, they would not exploit their fellows in just the same way. Phule asked the man to imagine that he had just been made Collector: what would be his attitude to his fellow villagers now under his authority? The man realised his dependence on the other

12 ibid., pp. 244–6.

members of the rural community, and in a very powerful passage described the kind of social loyalty that would prevent him from abusing his position:

Their children and my children have grown together all their lives. Their cowsheds and mine are next to each other. Their children and mine play in the same place. We both use the same well. We have the same dams and banks for storing water. We hold our pasture lands in common. In bad times, we share each other's sickles, pestles for pounding rice, snares, ploughshares, ropes, cables, and tools. We let each other use our buffaloes, and lend each other our bullocks for ploughing. The women of our families will drop in at any time of day or night to borrow oil, salt, or grain. When our women give birth, the others help out with the new baby, and bring round a cot to lend us. Our habits and customs are all the same. We eat similar food and wear the same clothes. Our gods are the same as theirs, and we worship the same family deities. We help each other out if our houses catch fire. Our funeral rites are the same, and we lend each other a hand at buryings, and visit each other's houses with bhakaris and rice water for the ceremonies of appeasement for our children. How could I possibly demand bribes from these people, my caste brothers, and set up feuds for generations to come between our families?[13]

To this polemical representation of village society, Phule added an account of its origins, stretching back to the time when primitive man had felt the need for the greater organisation and security of social life. The description of man in his natural state also emphasised the real independence of human nature and intelligence from the artificial structures of social rank. Phule drew his material here from a catholic range of sources, from Charles Darwin to Captain Cook.[14] The account of primitive man and the realities of human nature in its raw condition were clearly intended to recruit popular science to the range of non-Brahman arguments, and to provide his audience with an instrument for rejecting conventional social hierarchies that, in its objective and purely 'scientific' nature, would simply undercut all arguments in their favour.

Phule turned to early man's first settlement in villages in pursuit of security, and the emergence of different village offices. Here, he is clearly hoping to provide his rural audiences with the rationale and legitimation necessary for a direct attack on Brahman offices in the village, and in particular on the power of the *kulkarni*. Those in the state of nature who were courageous enough to strike out on their own and found new villages were called *patil* and *deshmukh*:[15] and even

13 ibid., pp. 267–8.

14 Phule quoted from James Cook's *Voyages Round the World* for his description of man in his primitive state. He only mentions Darwin's name, and does not refer to a particular work.

15 A *deshmukh* was a hereditary officer, the head of a *pargana* or district. His duties in the *pargana* corresponded with those of the *patil* in the village.

though the ignorant *patils* and *deshmukhs* of today's villages were completely subject to the Brahman *kulkarni*, the other villagers still obeyed them out of reverence for their ancient office. The *panch*, or village council, had been developed as pressure on the land increased, and some mechanism was necessary to resolve conflicts. The inhabitants of the village also banded together to protect themselves against the gangs of robbers and bandits that had grown up with the settlement of villages, who preferred to live outside these early communities and to prey on their honest labour. The villagers decided to impose taxes on themselves to pay for the appointment of full-time soldiers, and nominated officials to collect the taxes.[16]

The office of the *kulkarni*, however, had come into existence only after the disruption of the peaceful communities of India by the Aryan invaders:

> The Aryans gave the office of kulkarni in every village to people like Pralhad amongst the original inhabitants, who were feeble and cowardly and never supported the cause of their own countrymen, and who had never opposed the Brahmans, and took them into their confidence, hoping in this way to get the land that they had conquered properly administered.[17]

In this way, Phule hoped to make the office of the *kulkarni* into a daily and living reminder of the original expropriation of the *Shudras* for his rural audiences.

Kshatriya ideology and Maratha identity in the 1880s

In his account of the historical origins of village society, Phule was able to resolve an internal contradiction in his earlier writing: that between his assertion that the term *Kshatriya* derived from the pre-Aryan society of flourishing peasants, and its clear association with the high-status *varna* of conventional Hinduism. Phule overcame this by arguing that the original *Kshatriyas*, the ancestors of the Marathas of the ninety-six families had, like the Aryans, come from Iran. However, they came as friends and lived in harmony with the *Shudra* kingdoms already established, even helping them to resist the subsequent Aryan attacks:

> The representatives of the ninety-six families from Iran each established their own kingdoms, and by all co-operating with each other they managed their political affairs without any difficulty, and so for hundreds of years there was nothing to spoil their prosperity, and in the kingdoms of the Dasyus, Astiks, Ahirs, Agras, Pisacas, and Matangs, all the people were very happy and the dust of gold seemed to hang in the very air.[18]

16 Jotirao Phule, *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 218–21.
17 ibid., p. 224.
18 ibid., p. 221. Phule took the argument that Brahmans and *Kshatriyas* were in many cases descended from the same stock from John Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts on the*

In this way, the apparently 'Aryan' overtones of the *Kshatriya* status are explained, while the term still retains anti-Brahman overtones.

That Phule felt that this kind of clarification was necessary is an indication of the importance of *Kshatriya* ideology to the rural audiences of the Satyashodhak Samaj. As we shall see in the next chapter, arguments of *Kshatriya* status and Maratha identity featured strongly in non-Brahman polemic in the 1880s, and these arguments seemed at times perilously close to a simple Sanskritising claim. Phule's colleague Bhau Kondaji Patil was to use the argument of *Kshatriya* identity and Maratha status as a conscious strategy for the recruitment of support amongst rural audiences.

As we have seen, Phule himself remained more ambivalent towards the claim to a Maratha identity, especially where such claims seemed to take in nothing more than the right to wear the sacred thread and have the Vedic religious rituals appropriate to *Kshatriyas*. In *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, he deprecated such claims to Maratha status. He described the assumption of the sacred thread amongst *kunbis*, lamenting their failure to realise how all social divisions were part of the same engine for social oppression:

> On the full moon day, on the pretext of its being the month of Shravan, the Brahmans put the white sacred thread instituted by Gagabhat around the necks of some pretentious kunbis, and the kunbis now fail to read the warning in the Mahars having to wear a black thread to signify their low status.[19]

The *Shudras* had never worn a sacred thread until Gagabhat had confirmed a *Kshatriya* status for Shivaji. It is also worth nothing that Phule regarded claims to a conventional *Kshatriya* and Maratha status to be a typical mark of the kind of middle-rank cultivator that we saw him describe in the early part of this chapter:

> the ignorant and hopelessly indebted kunbi in the community of the Mali, kunbi, or dhangar cultivators, who, just because his great-grandfather's mother's sister, or his father's grandfather's daughter was given in marriage to a legitimate or even an illegitimate son in the house of Shinde or the Gayakavads, goes about bragging and pretending to everyone that he is a real Maratha.[20]

In an appendix to *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, Phule also recorded a conversation with 'one who calls himself a real Maratha'. He had just finished work on the second part of the book, he said, when he had an unexpected visitor, a man that he was unable to place by his dress or his manner. On enquiry, the man tells him that he is a Maratha of a

Origin and Progress of the Religion and Institutions of India, vol. II, London 1868–71, pp. 310 and 355. This was also a reply to the objections of the reviewer of his earlier work, *Slavery*, described on pp. 218–19.

19 Jotirao Phule, *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 196.

20 ibid., p. 233.

Maratha family. Phule dismisses this pretention to an elite status: 'All classes of people in Maharashtra get called Maratha, from the Mahars to the Brahmans, and so you have really told me nothing about which particular caste you belong to.'[21] At length, the man says that he is a *kunbi*.

Linked with this deprecation of claims to a conventional Maratha status were arguments about the actual social representatives of that status, the ruling Maratha families of western India. As potential leaders and patrons of a lower caste community, Phule was concerned with what he saw as the degeneracy of families like the Shindes, Holkars, Bhosales, and Gayakavads. In the introduction to *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, he argued that they had forgotten at what a cost the founders of their families had won their lands, wealth, and reputation. Instead of devoting themselves to their ancestral duties, which was the leadership of the *Shudra* communities of western India, and their proper education to meet the political challenges of the future, the princely families gave themselves up to a life of pleasure, squandered their wealth and allowed their real political power to fall into the hands of their Brahman ministers, who were only too pleased to see their masters dissipate themselves in this way. Again and again, he stressed that their own lack of education had contributed most to the decline of the princely families of the Marathas, with Shivaji himself as the outstanding example.[22] In this way, the apparent impoverishment and political impotence of the princely families was linked with an even longer tradition, of brave warriors rendered politically helpless when conventional Hindu attitudes discouraged them from educating themselves.

Brahman power and rural society in the 1880s

In his public polemic of the early 1880s, Phule restated much of his earlier material concerning Brahman power in the religious lives of the cultivators; Brahmans in the British administration and the idea of an unseen community of interest between different areas of Brahman activity. What was new was his concern at the apparently rapid growth of organised political pressure groups, with the intensification of the activities of the Bombay and Pune Associations in the late 1860s, and the formation of the Sarvajanik Sabha in 1870. Phule tried to under-

21 ibid., p. 266.

22 Phule had sent a copy of *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord* to the Maharaja of Baroda, and went to see the young Maharaja, shortly after his installation in 1881, to exhort him to fulfil his duties in the leadership and education of the lower castes. P. S. Patil, *The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule*, Chikhali 1927, pp. 121–4.

mine the position of the Sarvajanik Sabha by pointing out its predominantly Brahman composition, and placing the fact alongside all the other tactics for the maintenance of the political and and ideological hegemony of Brahman social groups that he had already described. The formation of Sabhas at the local level extended this:

In order to extend their influence, some cunning Brahman officials encourage mischievous and loud-mouthed Brahmans in the localities to come forward and set up important sounding societies in different places, and secretly apply their influence to the local Shudra cultivators, grass-sellers and wood-cutters, contractors, pensioners, and estate managers, and get them to become members of these societies.[23]

Phule criticised the calls for unity amongst all Hindus that formed a large part of the public propaganda of the Sarvajanik Sabha:

The Brahmans have hidden away the sword of their religion, which has cut the throat of the people's prosperity and now go about posing as great patriots of their country. They don't bother with the Mangs and Mahars, but use their books, newspapers and societies to give this advice to the best of our Shudra, Muslim and Parsi youth, that unless we put aside all quarrelling amongst ourselves about the divisions between high and low in our country, and come together with one heart and mind, then our unfortunate country will never make any progress.[24]

This, however, was the real meaning behind the appeals for unity:

It will be unity so long as it serves their purposes, and then it will be me here and you over there again. It's just like the old saying: We'll eat your seed-corn, and use mine for planting – this is how the Brahmans look after themselves. But if our learned Aryans really want to build unity amongst all the people, and improve the country, then they will have to get rid of this vile religion of winners and losers.[25]

While Brahmans held on to a sense of their religious superiority, it was impossible for any *Shudra* to make common cause with them.

Phule also took umbrage at the image of the cultivators that emerged from the reports of the Sabha on the state of agriculture in the Deccan, and in particular its representation of them as wilfully ignorant and chronically spendthrift:

If the leaders of the Sarvajanik Sabha were to put aside the blinkers that the pride of Hindu caste puts upon their eyes, and look properly at the condition of the cultivators, then they would not dare to call ignorant the poor unfortunate cultivators who have been so troubled and deceived by the prohibitions of a prejudiced religion.[26]

23 Jotirao Phule, *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 213.
24 ibid., pp. 254–5. 25 ibid., p. 259. 26 ibid., p. 202.

After his description of the poverty of the cultivator's wedding feast, he exclaimed:

> In spite of the pitiful weddings that the cultivators have, our supposedly intelligent Brahmans in their Sabhas, who lack the proper information, have put about a complete myth, and told the British government that the cultivators are so heavily in debt because they squander all their money at the weddings of their children. Has this Sabha, with its empty claims to a public name, made a single cultivator of the Mang or the Mahar caste one of its members and taken him to sit alongside the others?[27]

Phule also directed heavy criticism at the societies for religious reform, the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj. With their predominantly Brahman membership he felt that they represented the religious equivalent of the Brahman attempt to establish a provincial level of political leadership, and control in organisation and ideology, of lower caste groups. Phule dealt with the issues of the religious doctrine, social composition, and institutional form of the religious reform societies in two issues of an abortive periodical that he started in 1885, entitled *The Essence of Truth*.[28] In the same pamphlets, he also defended Pandita Ramabai against her attackers after her conversion to Christianity in 1883.[29] The pamphlets are organised in the form of a dialogue between a *Shudra* and a Brahman of the Brahmo Samaj, whom the *Shudra* pursued mercilessly over the matter of doctrine. He asked the Brahman which 'Brahma' the Samaj really regarded as the true one: the one from whose limbs the four *varnas* had sprung; the one who had given birth to Manu, the author of so many shameful books; or whether some clever sophist amongst the Brahmos had given the name 'Brahma' to the real original Creator of the universe, who preceded all these merely human constructs. The Brahman asserted that the aim of the Brahmo and Prarthana Samajes was to cull the truth from every religion, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim, and act according to it, but confessed rather lamely that no actual doctrine had been arrived at yet. The *Shudra*'s reply brought out the acute consciousness of religious doctrine as the

27 ibid., p. 245.

28 These two pamphlets are in Keer and Malshe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*. In the introduction to the first one, Phule says that since a few *Shudras* and *ati-Shudras* were now able to read and write, it was worth trying to bring out an occasional publication to illustrate the depravities of Brahmanic religion: Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 280. In the introduction to the second, he recorded that the rapid sale of the first one – 1,050 copies out of 2,000 printed within a month – had enabled him to publish the second: ibid., p. 294.

29 Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati was the Chitpavan Brahman who, after the death of her husband in 1882, devoted her life to social and religious reform with a special concern for Hindu women, and was baptised in England in September 1883. See S. M. Adhav, *Pandita Ramabai*, Christian Literature Society, Madras 1979.

basis for social hierarchies that was to be a characteristic of a wide variety of non-Brahman polemic:

Why should we Shudras and ati-Shudras, any more than Pandita Ramabai, put any trust in what you say, until you Brahmos have prepared such a book? Because another bold trouble-maker like Parashuram or Nana peshwa might come along at any time, and lend his weight to another devilish Brahman like Shankaracharaya, who would tell us once again that everything written in the books of the Aryan Brahmans came from God: and what power would the Mangs and Mahars have to refute them?[30]

From doctrine, the dialogue turned to the religious composition of the Samajes, and once again Phule tried to undermine the claim that the Samajes had broken away, ideologically at least, from the traditional structures of caste. The *Shudra* asked: 'If all you Brahmos have no regard for the divisions of caste, then how is it that you have not taken any Mahars into your Samaj?'[31]

Rural society under British rule

Phule applied the contrast between productive and parasitic groups with equal rigour to British institutions. In economic terms, he felt that British rule had only exacerbated the problems of poverty and indebtedness amongst the cultivators.[32] However, he was less concerned with simply deprecating the effects of British rule as with presenting an account of the unequal distribution of resources between those who laboured on the land and those who did not, which would include his more general analysis of the nature of Brahman power, and leave room for a positive role for a reformed British administration.

Phule was most stringent in his criticism of the British government in its setting up of a top-heavy administrative superstructure, composed both of European and of Brahman officials, the one incompetent and the other corrupt, who enjoyed comfortable salaries and pensions, all of which had to be paid for by the labour of the cultivators.

30 Jotirao Phule, *The Essence of Truth*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 284.

31 ibid., p. 284.

32 Phule put forward various criticisms of British economic policies and their effects on rural society. Amongst the most important were the frequent and exorbitant increases in land revenue demands, the depression of Indian crafts and manufactures through the import of British goods, the enormous interest charged on the Indian debt, the withdrawal of the employment opportunities that had existed under native governments for the younger sons of cultivators, thus increasing the pressure on the land, and the imposition of government restrictions on what had used to be common resources, such as the forests and rivers. For an introduction to the debate over the effects of British policy on the Indian economy and agriculture, see N. Charlesworth, *British Rule and the Indian Economy*, Economic History Society Studies in Economic and Social History, Macmillan, London 1982.

> Unless the Governor-General makes a recommendation to the Government at home that in all the Government Departments – Justice, Forest, Police, and Education, to reduce the pay and pensions of all who get more than one hundred rupees, then the cultivator will never get enough bread to fill himself and clothes to cover his body, and will never raise himself out of debt. The cultivator and his wife and children labour in the fields day and night, but after the land cess and the local fund, each person in the family is left with less than three rupees; while the very ordinary Indian and European government official cannot manage on fifteen rupees a month for his miscellaneous expenses and his drink.[33]

Even the local taxes, which were collected in part for the purpose of local education, went to support educational institutions from which Brahman children derived most benefit.[34]

The incompetence of some European officials added to the cultivators' difficulties. Often, they were more concerned with their own comfort than with gaining accurate information about rural society. Their inability to speak Marathi meant that they relied heavily on their subordinate officials, who often had their own schemes of extortion and aggrandisement. The inspection of crops for the granting of exemptions, for example, was often delegated to a Brahman official:

> With the help of the merciless kulkarni of the village, the ritually pure official takes along the ignorant and timid patil and a few drunken thugs, and carries out the inspection for the exemption himself.[35]

And, Phule implied, it was not difficult to imagine how they would go about granting exemptions.

Despite these shortcomings, Phule called for a more active role for a reduced British administration in changing the very structure of rural society. The children of the cultivators should be given a proper education in agricultural techniques. The office of the *patil* should no longer be hereditary, but should be conferred upon whichever candidate could show himself most proficient in using the plough, the harrow, and the hoe, and in the personal virtues of honesty and reliability. In the resulting competition, cultivators would be only too eager to send their children to school, and with overall levels of education rising, the influence of both priest and *kulkarni* in the village would be diminished.[36]

Phule had set up a standard of justice in society by which all those who did not labour to earn their living appeared as parasites. This was to open the way for the growth of hostility to the moneylender, which was to become so important in non-Brahman polemic in the 1890s and

33 Jotirao Phule, *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 231.
34 ibid., p. 264. 35 ibid., p. 249. 36 ibid., pp. 260–1.

after. To some extent, this move itself reflected the more general spread of the non-Brahman movement from its early base amongst first-generation urban and commercial groups to the rural centres and to those more directly engaged in village agriculture. However, Phule himself remained overwhelmingly concerned with the oppressions of orthodox Brahmanic religion itself. Indeed, he criticised the Agricultural Relief Act of 1879, which had followed on from the Deccan Riots of 1875 and the Bombay Government Report into their causes. The British government had little justification for its attack on the interest charged by a few poor village moneylenders, while imposing a huge rate of interest on the Indian debt.[37] Where exploitation by the moneylender did occur, Phule felt that it was rather the fault of the administrative machinery that allowed it. The effect of the Act of 1879 had merely been that 'no self-respecting moneylender will now let a cultivator even stand at his door'.[38]

Rural ideology and untouchable social groups

In his earlier writing, Phule had included untouchables in the lower caste community as the touchstone of a genuine caste-free society. It is evident from his organisational work right up to his death in 1890 that he never lost his concern and contact with the emergent movements of protest amongst untouchable groups. One of the first leaders and spokesmen of these movements was Gopal Baba Valangakar, a Mahar from the village of Ravadula, near Mahad in the Konkan. He had joined the army, and received a rudimentary education. While his battalion was stationed in Pune, he came into contact with Phule when the latter campaigned for support amongst the Mahar sections of the army. In 1888, Valangakar published a pamphlet, *The Elimination of Untouchability*, and in the same year founded 'The Society for Removing the Stigma of non-Aryan Origin'. Valangakar suggested that untouchables were originally *Kshatriyas* who had become polluted by eating meat during times of famine. There was a clear tension here with the tendency of other non-Brahman polemicists to equate *Kshatriya* status with an Aryan origin, even though this was done within a broader framework of hostility to conventional Hindu hierarchies.[39]

37 ibid., pp. 230–1. 38 ibid., p. 209.

39 Valangakar's pamphlet has been republished, with an introduction, in *Purogami Satyashodhak*, vol. 5, no. 3, July–September 1979 (Marathi), ed. Rosalind O'Hanlon. For an account of movements amongst untouchable groups from the end of the nineteenth century, see Eleanor Zelliot, 'The Nineteenth Century Background of the Mahar and Non-Brahman Movements in Maharashtra', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 3, no. 7, 1970.

Phule himself seems to have felt that the difficulties of the cultivators and those of the untouchables demanded a somewhat different approach, even though both derived at base from Brahmanic religion itself. At the end of his work *Slavery* he explained:

I have not concerned myself at all in this work either with the important princes and notables among the Shudras, nor with the pitiable condition of the untouchables. The reason for this is the empty pride of the former, and the very distance of the latter from the Shudra cultivators, through their greater misfortunes.[40]

Phule set out this separate analysis in an unpublished work, 'The Tale of the Untouchables', designed to illustrate the sheer misery of their material conditions of life, and the less than human status that had always been accorded them within Hindu society.[41] However, it is clear that he never gave up the ideological attempt to include all non-Brahman castes within a broader identity defined as *Kshatriya*, despite the more general tendencies of non-Brahman polemic from the 1890s. R. S. Ghadge, a retired Mahar *subhedar*, recalled how, when he was stationed in Pune in 1887, Phule used to come and address the Mahar regiment every Sunday, where he drew audiences of fifty to seventy-five people. Ghadge heard him read the third part of *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord* and argue that the Mahars and Mangs were bold warrior *Kshatriyas* who had been deceived and despised for thousands of years by the Brahmans.[42]

The cultivator as a symbol

Phule's talent for using symbols to identify the Satyashodhak Samaj as the natural leaders and representatives of the great masses of cultivators extended beyond the polemic of *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*. In 1888, the Duke of Connaught visited Pune, where the city dignitaries held a dinner in his honour to which Phule was invited. He arrived after all the other guests, who were startled to see what appeared to be a poor and ragged *kunbi* cultivator in their midst – with a torn turban on his head, an old blanket round his shoulders, a rustic *dhoti*, a scythe at his waist, and battered old sandals on his feet tied with string. After dinner, to the astonishment of the British guests, he rose and delivered an impassioned speech in fluent English. He contrasted the miserable plight of

40 Jotirao Phule, *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 264.

41 This manuscript is in the P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur. I have not attempted to examine it in detail yet, since the separate concern with untouchables falls outside the immediate scope of this book.

42 R. S. Ghadge to P. S. Patil, Pune 29 May 1930, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

the cultivators with the relative affluence of the small groups of urban-educated, and drove home the point that the real people of India were to be found in the villages. He told the British guests to go home and say that they had met a real Indian villager, a representative of the millions of cultivators, whose protection and advancement were the first duties of the British government.[43]

Here, we see a striking forerunner of the public style and the expert ability to exploit symbols that Mahatma Gandhi used in the political campaigns of the next century.

43 This account is in a letter from Gyanoba Sasane to P. S. Patil, Hadapsar, 27 May 1930, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

16

The non-Brahman movement in the 1880s

Introduction

The difficulties which the Satyashodhak Samaj encountered shortly after its foundation were not the symptoms of a decline in the vigour and attractiveness of its ideas, but rather the opposite. The following decade witnessed a rich flowering of institutional and organisational activity. The original concerns of the society, and Phule's drawing of a closer identification with Maharashtra's cultivators, provided the ideological basis for this activity. Both Phule and other Satyashodhak polemicists had always sought to hold together different, and sometimes contradictory, ideas and symbols, and the resulting ambiguity was just what gave Satyashodhak ideology its tremendous appeal. This very diversity allowed new leaders to concentrate on their own areas of organisation, whilst maintaining a larger orientation held in common with others who identified themselves in some way with the cause of the lower castes. With this simultaneous continuity and dissension, the non-Brahman movement provides a fascinating example of the relationship between ideas and political organisation under British rule.

All groups within the non-Brahman movement united in agreeing on the extreme inequality of Maharashtrian society. Those who laboured on the land and in the new urban centres formed the vast majority of the population, and contributed almost all of the revenues of the Bombay government. However, the much smaller numbers of those who made a living in administrative, professional, and other clerical and service roles had monopolised the benefits of education and employment under British rule. The very large mass of 'backward' castes lived in the most crippling poverty, often entangled in debt, without education or even the desire for it, the victims of harmful social customs and all the vices of the ignorant. Special aid and support for these castes formed the first duty of the British government. The Marathi term for 'backward', *magasalela*, became a key word in the vocabularies of non-Brahmans. Its opposite was *sarasavalela*, meaning 'forward', or 'advanced'.

Taken on its own, the argument for the practical uplift of these lower

castes was constructive, non-polemical, and critical of no particular group. It represented the movement's most 'respectable' argument, the most basic level on which all groups agreed, and the point at which a distinctively non-Brahman idea shaded off into simple benevolent reformism. At the very least, however, this argument was always given a sharper edge by the belief that the 'advanced' in society were mostly Brahman by caste. This gave the basic division between Brahman and non-Brahman. This did not in itself imply any hostility to Brahmans. Some leaders, such as Madhavrao Raghoji Rokade in Bombay, identified themselves as 'non-Brahman' and 'backward', but argued that Brahmans were not particularly culpable for the condition of the lower castes. They criticised Phule, Bhalekar, Lokhande, and others who attacked Brahmans openly, saying that this would do more harm than good to lower caste efforts to better themselves.

Non-Brahman leaders who did believe that Brahmans were the hostile opponents of lower caste improvement, but who wished to avoid bad feeling and controversy for the sake of a particular project, could also limit themselves to the simple argument for practical reform. Krshnarao Bhalekar and Ganapat Sakharam Patil, for example, gained support for a school for the lower castes in Pune from almost every section of the local community, including many Brahmans. Yet the two continued to make the most biting criticisms of Brahman conservatism and selfishness, to different audiences.

This very open hostility was most characteristic of the Satyashodhak Samaj itself. Satyashodhak ideology accepted the idea of lower caste backwardness, but held further that Brahmans had combined to use their religious authority and their more recently acquired administrative and political power to perpetuate this division. This was non-Brahman ideology at its most radical and controversial, arguing for a thorough-going elimination of all kinds of Brahman power as the prerequisite for the liberation of the lower castes. Such undisguised antagonism might by itself have been an unwieldy instrument of propaganda, whose usefulness was limited by the resistance that it provoked, both amongst moderate and 'respectable' reformers and amid popular audiences, who were reluctant to accept such wholesale condemnation of Brahmans. When this hostility was linked, however, with the issue of independence in ritual, and enhanced with the imagery of the toiling cultivator, it became a most potent force for the recruitment of support. This was particularly the case in the rural communities, where Satyashodhak ideology linked up with the issue of indebtedness amongst the cultivators.

Maratha identity and *Kshatriya* status also occupied a central place in

non-Brahman ideology. We have seen how these associated ideas put forward the cultivating and labouring castes as the true inheritors of Maharashtra's traditions and culture, her natural social leaders, and the most important recipients of government support. Non-Brahman leaders directed their claims to the 'Maratha' title both to their prospective constituencies and to the British government. They gave a slightly lower public profile to their assertion of *Kshatriya* status, intending it as a symbol for the recruitment of popular support rather than an argument which might be used to persuade the British government. Both the *Kshatriya* and the Maratha issues implied, in slightly different ways, a tension with Brahman opinion. Non-Brahmans varied considerably in the prominence which they gave to this implied hostility. Rokade, for example, combined his distrust of overt anti-Brahman polemic with a strong interest in *Kshatriya* status and Vedic ritual for Marathas. Lokhande, on the other hand, linked his assertion of a Maratha identity exclusively for all labouring and cultivating castes with a ferocious opposition to Brahmans in every sphere. Differences such as these easily became a matter of contention between non-Brahmans themselves. The idea of *Kshatriya* identity always contained the risk of a slip back into simple Sanskritisation. As non-Brahmans all over the western Deccan and in Bombay actually began to carry out Vedic rituals for themselves, a readiness to express hostility to Brahmans became an important proof that these ritual innovations were truly radical in spirit. Divisions arose when, as in the case of Rokade, this hostility was not forthcoming.

Conflicts or differences of opinion within the non-Brahman movement could therefore have a variety of causes. Contrasts of temperament and difficulties of authority in a new organisation could produce friction where no real ideological difference existed. The need to make slight changes of emphasis in non-Brahman polemic for different audiences could lead to disagreement if some were not prepared to make such a compromise. Some real divergences of opinion did exist, most notably over the issue of direct attacks on Brahmans. Finally, all non-Brahman leaders competed with each other, as well as with their opponents in Maharashtrian society at large, for the control of important symbols. 'Maratha', *Kshatriya*, the figures of Shivaji and of the toiling cultivator could be given a variety of meanings even within the non-Brahman movement. The issue of their control was as closely fought within the movement itself as it was between non-Brahmans and other leaders in the Bombay Presidency who attempted to use them.

However, these centrifugal forces within the movement were held in check by the central thrust of non-Brahman ideology itself. What all

groups within the movement shared was the same basic notion of opposition: of measurement against a standard attained by other castes, but not by themselves. This gave rise to a pervasive sense of division and juxtaposition, which went beyond the issue of practical inequalities in society, and came to form the dynamic of non-Brahman ideology. Without it, the rationale for any separate movement of the non-Brahman castes collapsed. This gave a recognisable ideological coherence to the broader movement. This underlying coherence had two extremely important and practical results. First, it meant that declared rivals and opponents showed a willingness to work together, and to appear on the same platforms, that would have been astonishing in a different political context. The second vital consequence was the emergence of a consistent and vocal opposition to the Indian National Congress, in which all non-Brahman groups joined.

The rural campaigns of 1884

In the introduction to *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, Phule expressed his gratitude to 'the Shudra gentlemen in Pune, Bombay, Thana, Junnar, Otur, Hadapsar, Vangani, the Mali fields and other places, who have heard me read from this book on several occasions'.[1] This period of writing and public speaking took place in 1882 and 1883. It was in the villages of Junnar Taluka, the home of Bhau Kondaji Patil 60 miles directly to the north of Pune, that Satyashodhak campaigning found its first large rural response.

Even before the return of Bhau Kondaji Patil from Gwalior in 1882, there were reports of friction between villagers and the local Brahmans in Junnar Taluka. The *Din Bandhu* of June 1880 reported that the cultivators of Ganapati's Vazar were very anxious to get a vernacular school for the village. A school had been opened on three previous occasions, but the village Brahmans had advised the cultivators against sending their children to school regularly, and so it had been closed for lack of support.[2] In April 1881, the *Din Bandhu* recorded that on visiting the government vernacular school in the town of Junnar, the Collector of Pune found that it was not attended by any lower caste children. The local people told him that the masters in the school were Brahmans, and disliked having the children of cultivators in their

1 Jotirao Phule, *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*, D. Keer and S. G. Malshe (eds.), p. 191.

2 *Din Bandhu*, 20 June 1881, Bombay Presidency *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 26 June 1881 (Marathi). Very few copies of the *Din Bandhu* have survived for the early 1880s, and so I have used the summaries given in the *Native Newspaper Reports* for this period.

classes. They suggested that teachers from amongst the Marathas and *kunbis* should be appointed. The Collector ordered such a school to be opened, which was now attended by fifty children of the farmers in the town.[3]

In May 1884, Satyashodhak leaders organised a number of mass meetings in the town of Junnar and surrounding villages. These meetings set off a widespread boycott, both economic and ritual, of the local Brahmans, and a similar movement against moneylenders. These were accompanied by calls for a fairer share of education and government employment for the lower castes, and by a sharp increase in tension between villagers and Brahmans. A letter in the *Dynanodaya* of 24 July 1884 described the Satyashodhak campaign. Some years previously, the Brahmans of Junnar had increased their prices for performing ceremonies, and so efforts were being made to resist their exactions. In May, Jotirao Phule and Narayanrao Lokhande, the editor of the *Din Bandhu*, held two or three great meetings in the district. Several thousand Marathas, Malis, Sonars, Shimpis, and other Hindus gathered to listen. Even if the main part of the speakers' criticisms of Brahmans was true, the writer commented, they had nevertheless exaggerated matters:

> Mr Phule showed in his lecture that wherever one turned these days, there was a Brahman. Take whatever Government Department you like, he said – the Justice Department, the Police Department, the Revenue Department, the Education Department, the Medical Department – all offices, courts and places of business were packed with Brahmans. These priest-beggars had forgotten the code of behaviour proper to Brahmans, had learned the language of mlechchas, had thrust aside their ancient titles of Shastri, Pandit and Vaidic and replaced them with BA, MA, BD, LL B and so on. They monopolised all education for themselves, and refused other castes all access to their offices and courts.

Bhau Kondaji Patil's younger brother, Govind Bhau, witnessed these Junnar campaigns. Under Patil's leadership, Phule said, all the young cultivators must join together and impose a boycott on the local Brahmans while the latter held on to their ideas of superior religious purity. The service castes should refuse to visit them, labourers should let their fields lie fallow, and the Malis should withhold supplies of fruit and vegetables. Similar action should be taken against tyrannical moneylenders, especially where these were Brahmans.[4]

The *Din Bandhu* of May 1884 commented on the causes of these tensions in the countryside which made the villagers so receptive to

3 *Din Bandhu*, 17 April 1881, *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 23 April 1881.
4 Govind Bhau Patil Dumare to P. S. Patil, Otur, 26 May 1939, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

Satyashodhak ideas. The inhabitants of about forty villages in Junnar, who had agreed amongst themselves to have marriages and other religious ceremonies performed without the aid of Brahman priests, and had already performed 300 such marriages, were in dread of the retaliation of local government officials, who were almost all Brahmans. The local priests had used to charge between Rs 10 and Rs 20 for each ceremony and, where a cultivator was unable to pay, they would take a bond for this amount with his land as security. The farmer often lost his land and had no means of redress, since most government officials were also Brahmans.[5]

Govind Bhau Patil described the effects of the Satyashodhak campaign. The villagers boycotted the Brahmans, carrying out their own religious rites, and refusing to till the fields of Brahman landlords for a period of almost three years. Brahman priests, who had previously charged anything up to Rs 20 became prepared to conduct ceremonies for a few annas. Brahman landlords brought down their rents to where they were just sufficient to pay the land tax. Moneylenders' fields lay fallow. Brahman teachers and government officials retaliated in kind. The former refused to teach the village children, and so Patil and Phule petitioned the Director of Public Instruction to appoint a non-Brahman master in every school, and Patil set up a school for the children in his native town of Otur, staffed entirely by non-Brahmans. Some Brahman officials made up a court case against him, and succeeded in getting him imprisoned for a month, after which the case against him was quashed.[6]

The villagers of Junnar showed a surprising pragmatism when it came to conducting their own weddings and other ceremonies. The *Dnyanodaya* of 22 May 1884 described their attitudes:

> The people of Junnar thought that all this was very unprecedented, and so the leaders had to make very careful arrangements for the weddings. The people said that there would be no real difficulty provided that whoever performed the ceremonies included all the proper rituals. In any case, they disliked the authority of the Brahmans over them, and thought that it would be to their advantage to reject the normal practice of their caste. They were prepared to suffer the consequences every day of their lives, until their very blood dried up. The priests had got into the habit of charging from five to twenty rupees per wedding, and this had pressed very harshly on the poor people.

The dispute with the Brahmans of Junnar reached a climax towards the end of the decade. The priests of Otur filed a case against Balaji Kesaji Patil, who had performed his daughter's marriage without a Brahman. They claimed that they were entitled to a marriage fee

5 *Din Bandhu*, 25 May 1884, *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 31 May 1884.
6 Govind Bhau Patil Dumare to P. S. Patil, Otur, 26 May 1939, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

whether or not they had actually conducted the ceremony. Phule and Patil fought the case all the way to the High Court in Bombay. A proclamation put just as the case was going to the High Court in 1888 conveys the tone of Satyashodhak propaganda:

> All the followers of the Hindu religion, especially Marathas, Malis, kunbis, Kolis, Dhangars, and other castes, are informed by this letter that the Brahmans take and squander money from our people at weddings, religious ceremonies and at the time of other auspicious and inauspicious rites. For these reasons, and because the Hindu Shastras allow full authority for each man to perform his own rituals in religion, people of the above castes in several areas have for some time been carrying out their own ceremonies without the aid of Brahmans. However, the Brahmans do not like this, because it means that they lose the produce and goods that they otherwise receive without having to sweat and toil.[7]

The High Court returned the verdict in favour of Phule's side.

In these rural campaigns, Phule, Patil, and Lokhande brought about a very skilful fusion between the ideological concerns of the society, and the existing discontents of the villagers themselves. Their simultaneous attack on the religious authority and the educational and occupational privileges of Brahmans found a ready response. Malis and Marathas, in the small towns and villages of Junnar, appeared to be as sharply aware as their urban counterparts of the numerical predominance of Brahmans in higher education and government institutions. Prominent rural families, such as the Patils of Otur, had additional reasons for resentment. Families holding the office of *patil*, the hereditary headship of the village, had suffered a dramatic loss of power and authority since the introduction of British rule. To a very large extent, the beneficiaries of their loss had been Brahmans. The old Maratha *patil* families found that the values and accomplishments upon which their authority in rural society was based appeared to lose their power and relevance as British administration penetrated deeper into western Indian society. The talents that now mattered were literacy, a command of fluent English, a knowledge of administrative procedures of all kinds, professional qualifications, and a cosmopolitan familiarity with urban as well as rural, British as well as Hindu, society.

Brahmans had also gained in power and influence at the expense of the *patil* families within the village itself. Under the land revenue systems introduced by the British government, the *patil* lost his overall responsibility for the collection and payment of the land taxes due from the village. Each individual cultivator was to be liable for the payment of his own tax. The Brahman *kulkarni*, or village accountant, became

7 This proclamation is reprinted in Keer and Malshe (eds.), pp. 275–6.

the main channel of communication between the village and the local revenue office. In this strategic mediatory position, the *kulkarni* was able to influence such vital issues as the level of new assessments, remissions of rent in case of crop failure, and the fate of cultivators unable to pay their taxes.[8]

Thus, village *patils* and local Maratha landowners found in non-Brahman ideology both an explanation for this traumatic change in their status and powers and the practical means to recoup their position. The idea of their ancient authority as *Kshatriyas*, now swallowed up by the Brahmans, perfectly fitted their sense of a loss of power, and their longer-standing preoccupation with *Kshatriya* status and ritual. The vision of Maharashtra as the society of the Marathas offered another means of attacking Brahman privileges. Non-Brahman arguments offered to village families the means of performing their own rituals, a great attraction when, as so many contemporaries claimed, Brahmans charged a very high price for their services. It is not clear whether these families also took the opportunity to include in their ceremonies the Vedic texts, appropriate to *Kshatriyas*, that had previously been denied them. This was certainly the practice in the rural non-Brahman movement by the end of the decade. On a more practical level, the glorification of physical toil that characterised Phule's public polemic at this time provided scope for an attack on the village moneylender, the most obvious focus for the anger and frustration of the cultivator in debt. Finally, non-Brahman proposals for education, and for a reformation of popular morals, pointed the way to the practical skills and the social discipline that were needed to compete with Brahmans for posts in the British administration.

Non-Brahman leaders in the 1880s

We turn back now to the urban movement in the 1880s, where a very wide variety of activists and polemicists took up non-Brahman ideas. Heavily in debt, Krshnarao Bhalekar had handed over the editorship of the *Din Bandhu* to Narayanrao Lokhande in Bombay in 1880. For the next four years, he kept himself by working as an overseer in the building of the Nira canal at Viravadi. Having recouped his financial position, he returned to public life in 1884 and immediately set about organising two projects. In November 1884, he set up a boarding-house in Pune, so that children of families living outside Pune could be

8 For an account of these changes in the functions of the *patil* and the *kulkarni*, see Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay 1976, pp. 80–3.

accommodated and supervised properly when they came to Pune to study. After about a year, however, the scheme collapsed amidst a welter of recriminations. The parents of the children complained of the conditions at the boarding-house and removed them. Bhalekar suspected Phule of having plotted to undermine the scheme, jealous of his authority, and the old rivalry between the two flared up in angry public exchanges.[9]

In the same year, however, Bhalekar scored an undoubted success with the setting up of the Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha, the 'Public Association of the Brothers of the Poor'. Bhalekar and a group of friends had spent some time attempting to increase the attendance at the meetings of the Satyashodhak Samaj. These were still held weekly in Pune, at the house of Dr Sadoba Gavade, but never attracted more than twenty-five people. This decided Bhalekar on his new initiative.[10] The Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha held its first meeting in November 1884, and took a different tack from the Satyashodhak Samaj. First, members were to put their energy primarily into schemes of education and practical reform. The rules forbade all discussion of religious issues because, as Bhalekar said, arguments about religion invariably divided members and wasted time.[11] Bhalekar clearly hoped to create in the Sabha a public platform that would be free of the reputation for extreme hostility to Brahmans which had alienated some support from the Satyashodhak Samaj. The Sabha's second purpose, indicated in its title, was to stand as an open challenge to the Pune Sarvajanik Sabha, refuting the latter's claim to be the chief representative of the public interest before the Bombay government.

The *Din Mitra* of May 1888, a monthly non-Brahman newspaper then just started by Bhalekar's nephew, Ganapat Sakharam Patil, described the aims of the Sabha, expressed at its fourth annual meeting. These were to keep the British government constantly aware and informed of the real difficulties of the lower castes, to encourage the latter to educate themselves, and to stamp out harmful practices, such as child marriage, gambling, expenditure at weddings which led to debt, and drunkenness. The *Din Mitra* of July 1888 carried an English editorial on the Sabha, which conveyed perfectly its simultaneous equivocation over the plight of non-Brahmans. British rule had been a

9 In his pamphlet, *Satsar*, published in October 1885, for example, Phule published a letter from one of the parents in Bombay, reproaching Bhalekar for conditions at the school. Keer and Malshe (eds.), p. 304.

10 Sitaram Raghunath Tarkunde, *A history of the non-Brahman and the Maratha movements, and the ancient lineage of the Marathas*, Pune 1922 (Marathi), pp. 15–17.

11 *Din Mitra*, June 1889 (Marathi).

great blessing to the country, but it was clear that the government lacked basic facts about its subjects:

> We regret to observe that the information generally obtained from the Press, the various Public Associations and the High Officials is not always correct. The reason is obvious. The people from whom the much-needed information is obtained are not in possession of the actual facts of the case, nor do they care much to trouble themselves to collect full and complete information . . . we, therefore, who belong to the poor agricultural, mercantile, artisan and other ignorant classes have established the DINBUNDHU SARVAJANIK SABHA.

The Sabha was very active throughout the 1880s. In 1888, Bhalekar, Patil, and others launched the Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha Free School in Pune, and launched a Deccan-wide appeal for funds for the worthy cause of educating the children of the poor. An advertisement in the *Sholapur Samachar* newspaper of 1 October 1889 conveys the spirit of the appeal. After calling on local people to send their contributions to Pune, it took up the issue of lower caste education with the classic non-Brahman contrast between the producers and the mere consumers in society:

> Those who do office work get their education all right, and just sit contentedly in their jobs as clerks. How long must the cultivators, the labourers, the tradesmen and other workers, who actually increase the wealth of the country, just sit around waiting to be given the agricultural techniques, the skills and the trade that are enjoyed by their opposite numbers in advanced countries?

The school turned out to be an enormous success. It attracted considerable support amongst the lower castes, most notably from the fruit and vegetable traders of the Reay market in Pune, where each stallholder contributed a small monthly sum. It appeared, moreover, that the Sabha's efforts to avoid open propaganda on religious issues paid considerable dividends. Many public figures in Pune contributed to its funds: the Parsi Dorabji Padmanji Shet, the scholar Dr R. M. Bhandarkar, Mahadev Govind Ranade, the Brahman reformer Vishnu Moreshvar Bhide, the secretary of the Deccan Maratha Education Association, Gangaram Bhau Mhaske, and Sayajirao Gayakavad, the Maharaja of Baroda. The school was put on the register of the Department of Public Instruction, so that it could receive government aid and regular inspections.[12]

In the same year, the Sabha made further efforts to broaden the base of its support. In September 1888, the *Din Mitra* reported plans to open a branch in the town of Junnar. In June 1889, the paper reported that a

12 Sitaram Raghunath Tarkunde, *A history of the non-Brahman and the Maratha movements*, pp. 23–6.

group of Bombay men had invited Bhalekar to found a branch in the city. Dharmaji Ballaji Patil, Viththalarao Krshnaji Vandekar, Tukaram Vithoba Pandhare, and Madhavrao Mukundaji Savant formed the nucleus of this new Sabha. The inaugural meeting was also attended by Madhavrao Raghoji Rokade, who has already been mentioned as a 'moderate' non-Brahman, and Krshnarao Arjun Keluskar, then a schoolteacher in Bombay, and later to become an important non-Brahman polemicist and activist. Rokade made a bitter attack on the Pune Sarvajanik Sabha. In their communications to the Bombay government, its members made a great show of representing the interests of the people as a whole. Yet, Rokade argued, there was no issue of more pressing public importance than the education of the mass of illiterate cultivators and labourers who made up the bulk of western Indian society. The Sarvajanik Sabha had done nothing to relieve the plight of these and other classes who were backward in education.

In the Indian National Congress, however, the leaders of the Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha perceived a danger that far outweighed the local efforts of the Pune Sabha. In the wealth of talent that it attracted, and in its ability to bring together men and interests from all three Presidencies, and from quite different levels of society, the Congress represented a new phenomenon Indian politics, better-placed than any of its local organisational predecessors to make very broad claims for its views. The Congress represented a spectre that had haunted non-Brahman thinkers since the early 1870s: a political body, dominated by Brahmans and the urban-educated, that was capable of winning for itself an institutionalised position as a mediator between the British government and the larger masses of Indian society. Such a development would not only deprive of an effective political voice groups who felt that their own interests diverged sharply from those represented in the leadership of the Congress. In the longer term, it would mean that the effects of British rule would not be to emancipate the lower castes. It would rather be to enshrine, as a permanent feature of Indian politics, institutions which required of those who wished to engage in them skills and resources which were possessed by very few in Indian society.

Without anything remotely resembling the resources or the organisational talents of the Congress, Bhalekar's Sabha nevertheless lost no opportunity of attacking it. Sitaram Raghunath Tarkunde, a young activist in the Sabha, described how Bhalekar and other leaders were prompted to action in 1889 by the great preparations being made for the Indian National Congress meeting at Allahabad. Non-Brahman newspapers, such as Lokhande's *Din Bandhu* and the *Ambalahari*, edited by

H. N. Navalakar, another prominent member of the Sabha, had published numerous articles urging that Congress demands should better reflect the needs of the people, particularly for compulsory primary education. These having produced no effect, it was decided to hold a rival meeting, so that the Bombay government would not form the impression that the pronouncements of the Congress met with approval amongst all groups in the Presidency. Huge coloured posters were prepared, like those advertising theatre performances, with the caption: 'We do not want the National Congress, because it does not represent the interests of the people.' The meeting, held on a large open ground in Pune, was attended by non-Brahman leaders of every shade of opinion. Tarkunde described the four resolutions on which the meeting decided:

1 If 99 out of every 100 people in the population have never even heard of the National Congress, it cannot be called a National Congress, meaning chosen by the nation and respected by the nation.
2 The nation has not elected this National Congress, and does not regard it as such; therefore its decisions cannot be said to be approved by the country at large.
3 This National Congress is just composed of a handful of upper-class and educated people. Therefore it should not represent its decisions as those of the whole nation.
4 The Government should begin to introduce compulsory education for all.[13]

Bhalekar's Sabha had set out to establish a respectable reputation for moderate and constructive reform. With a flexibility typical of relations within the non-Brahman movement, however, this did not prevent its personnel from engaging, on other platforms, in the most virulent anti-Brahman propaganda. Bhalekar himself was the author of several fiercely polemical tracts in this period.[14] Tarkunde recalled that a twice-weekly market was held in the big open space to the north of the old palace of the peshwas in Pune. In the middle of the market, there was a high raised stone platform. In 1887, Ganapat Sakharam Patil, the editor of the *Din Mitra*, and headmaster of the Free School, began a kind of 'wayside pulpit' from this platform on market days, speaking to the crowds about the Satyashodhak Samaj, 'casting off all restraint, and slandering the Brahmans freely'. Some of the market-goers clapped and shouted their approval; others returned Patil's maledictions in kind.[15]

13 ibid., pp. 27–9.
14 In 1878, for example, Bhalekar published a collection of Marathi poems entitled *Hitopadesh*, or 'Useful advice', which included many pieces on the evils of caste, the vices of the Brahmans, and the exploitation of the *Shudras* in ritual.
15 Sitaram Raghunath Tarkunde, *A history of the non-Brahman and the Maratha movements*, pp. 17–18.

Marutrao Ramji Navale, Dajiba Patil and Gopal Chikhalikar, members of the Satyashodhak Samaj, joined Patil in his lectures. Eventually, in 1890, the Pune City Municipal Committee removed the platform, and prohibited public speaking in the market.[16] Predictably, the *Din Bandhu* suspected a Brahman conspiracy here. The paper protested against the ban on its preaching of religious doctrines on the public roads of Pune, alleging that the local Brahmans had misrepresented them to the Municipal Committee, and asking the government to suspend the ruling.[17]

The Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha undertook other projects with members of the Satyashodhak Samaj. The *Din Mitra* of September 1888 reported that Dhondiram Namadev Kumbhar, a close friend of Phule, and a very active propagandist for the Satyashodhak Samaj, had been visiting Kolhapur, Satara, and other towns in the western Deccan, giving public lectures about the Samaj. Having exhausted his funds, he returned to Pune for assistance, but was told that the society had nothing in its funds. He approached Bhalekar's Sabha, which gave him some help.[18]

Supporters of the two bodies had also joined forces in April 1885. *Gudi Padava* was the first day of the Hindu New Year, when coloured flags were customarily displayed outside each house. It was decided to make up and parade a flag for the Satyashodhak Samaj, and invitations were sent out to all the society's members and well-wishers. A flag was devised, which recalled the original initiation ceremony, with its focus on the figure of Khandoba. Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan, who was present, described the procession. A long bamboo pole supplied the flagstaff, tied around with red, green, and yellow strips of cloth. A broader sheet of cloth hung from the top of the pole, sprinkled with turmeric and red powder. Garlands of flowers, palm-leaves and coconuts hung from the flagstaff.[19] The flag was held up on a bullock-cart at the centre of the procession. A band of Mahars played music in front of the cart, and a great crowd of people walked behind. Almost all prominent non-Brahmans were present: Bhalekar, Phule, Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru from Bombay, Dr Sadoba Gavade, who had

16 ibid., p. 29.

17 *Din Bandhu*, 2 February 1890, *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 8 February 1890.

18 Dhondiram was an extremely prolific writer of Satyashodhak tracts and letters to non-Brahman newspapers. His works *The Mirror of Truth*, Bombay 1893 (Marathi), and *Thoughts on the Vedas*, Bombay 1896 (Marathi), contrasted Hindu religious texts with the customs and beliefs of Hindus in the present. *Tamasha*, Bombay 1897 (Marathi), inveighed against vice and drunkenness amongst the lower castes.

19 Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan to P. S. Patil, Chinchavad, 6 February 1928, P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

hosted meetings of the society in Pune, Harischandra Narayanrao Navalakar, Bandoba Malharaba Taravade, and Laksmanrao Ghorpade, stalwarts of the Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha. The flag was paraded around the city for five hours and came to a halt at Gavade's house, where speeches were given about the importance of education, the evils of drink, and the more general aims of the society.[20]

Bhalekar also maintained his relations with the larger body of the Mali caste in Pune, who did not take a direct part in non-Brahman activity. While these were not drawn by more radical Satyashodhak ideas, they were prepared to listen to Bhalekar's arguments of the necessity for a new kind of organisation if the Malis were to achieve the high levels of literacy, and the ability to act as a concerted body, which were essential if they were to make their voices heard alongside those of the more advanced caste groups in the Presidency. In the *Din Mitra* of May 1888, Bhalekar described the normal weekly caste meeting of the Phulmalis of Pune, the Mali sub-caste to which many Satyashodhak leaders belonged. The Phulmalis attempted to discuss the affairs of the caste, especially the very worrying increase in drunkenness, and the rules about interdining. As usual, however, no one was properly appointed to take charge of the proceedings, and the meeting dissolved rapidly into chaos. Moreover, Bhalekar argued, these meetings were pointless anyway. They were attended irregularly, by a mere handful of people, who had no authority to speak for the 2,000-strong Phulmali caste in Pune. All members of the caste should join to elect a proper representative caste council, which would be able to set about fund-raising in an organised fashion, and whose decisions would apply to the whole caste. Bhalekar proposed the same structure that had been adopted by the Pune Sarvajanik Sabha. The caste council should be composed of men who could supply a *mukhtiaranama* – a letter signed by fifty adult men, giving the member authority to take decisions on their behalf. Bhalekar's advice found a ready audience. The *Din Mitra* of the following month, June 1888, described how Bhalekar and Ganapat Sakharam Patil had convened a great meeting of 1,500 Phulmalis, at which fifteen men brought forward their letters of representation, and were duly announced as the elected members of the new caste council. No prominent Satyashodhak or other non-Brahman leaders were amongst these.

However, Bhalekar's initiative was to meet with the same resistance from established leaders in the Mali caste that were encountered by the Satyashodhak Samaj. Writing in 1909 to a non-Brahman activist,

20 Sitaram Raghunath Tarkunde, *A history of the non-Brahman and the Maratha movements*, pp. 16–17.

Tukaram Namadev Girame, who was then engaged in organising the first Mali Education Conference, he related his own experience of the difficulty of persuading the whole caste to act together:

I called together all the important Mali gentlemen from different places in Pune, and held a great meeting. I tried to effect a compromise between them, and to establish a Sabha. An account of this was published in the monthly newspaper of that time, the *Din Mitra*. However, those whose interests would have been damaged by the growth of unity and education among the people, set about misrepresenting these efforts to some of the leaders amongst us, and the whole enterprise was ruined.[21]

Narayanrao Meghaji Lokhande was no less active than Bhalekar in the 1880s. Under his editorship, the circulation of the weekly *Din Bandhu* rose to a peak of 1,650 copies in 1884, making it larger than any other Marathi or Anglo-Marathi newspaper in the Presidency, with the exception of the *Kesari*, launched in 1881 under the leadership of V. K. Chiplunkar, G. G. Agarkar, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, which had a very much larger circulation of 4,350.[22] The paper championed causes from the whole spectrum of non-Brahman concerns. This great polemical facility for fusing together a wide range of issues into a single argument of extreme emotional appeal was exemplified in an article published in December 1888. The peasantry, upon whom the country's prosperity absolutely depended, remained in the darkness of ignorance. Meanwhile, the clerks, office workers, professionals, and others in 'white-collar' occupations, who fed fat upon the labour of the cultivators, had allowed their education to go to their heads, and were seeking to obstruct the British government by setting up institutions like the Indian National Congress. The *Din Bandhu* urged its readers to remain aloof from such agitations. The leaders of the Congress should attend to the most basic rights of the cultivators before they pressed their own needs on the government. They should set about eradicating the belief that a Brahman was polluted by the touch of a *Shudra*, but not by that of a beast or bird. They should realise that the peasants had the same desire as themselves for high posts and for education. They should seek to realise these hopes before they busied themselves with obtaining privileges from the government by holding National Congresses.[23]

While Lokhande's *Din Bandhu* put itself forward as the champion of cultivators and labourers, the paper also took up the cause of more

21 Krshnarao Bhalekar to Tukaram Namadev Girame, Amaravati, 14 February 1909, Krshnarao Bhalekar MSS, Collection of Dr R. M. Patil.

22 See the circulation figures given for these papers in *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 6 September 1884.

23 *Din Bandhu* 23 December 1888, *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 29 December 1888.

specific occupational groups. The most important of these were the workers in Bombay's textile mills, on behalf of whom Lokhande conducted a vociferous campaign. Following the appointment of the Factory Commission in 1884 to examine the whole question of conditions in the mills, Lokhande formed the Millhands Association to press for improvements in the hours and pay of the workers, and published a stream of articles in the *Din Bandhu* on the issue.[24] The paper also gave publicity to the grievances of low-level employees in the government service, such as low-grade hospital assistants and workers in the postal service.[25]

Following on the precedent set by the Satyashodhak Samaj, Lokhande campaigned strongly for the introduction of some measure of positive discrimination in favour of non-Brahman castes in the educational policies of the Bombay government. The *Din Bandhu* of 19 December 1880, for example, argued that the 5 per cent of places in government high schools, which were given away as free scholarships, should go to boys of the Maratha and associated castes, especially as the headmasters of high schools, who were mostly Brahmans, tended to favour students of their own caste when handing out the free studentships.[26] In the longer term, pressures such as these did not go unheeded by the government of Bombay. In 1885, the Director of Public Instruction for the Presidency, Lee Warner, ruled that half of this 5 per cent of free places should be awarded to boys of other than Brahman castes. The *Din Bandhu* and the *Kesari* newspaper clashed fiercely over the issue early in 1886, after the *Kesari* had come out against Lee Warner's order. The writer of the *Din Bandhu*'s articles felt pity, he said, for the chagrin felt by *Kesari* at seeing the new activity of the lower classes. The fact was that in many quarters, the intelligent portion of the Maratha *Shudra* community had already thrown off their bonds, and had gone so far as to perform the most solemn domestic ceremonies without the aid of the Brahmans, and that in the face of the

24 For this early episode in the history of the labour movement in Bombay, see S. D. Mehta, *The Cotton Mills of India: 1854 to 1954*, Bombay 1954, pp. 132–45. A discussion of the role of social factors, including that of caste, is in R. K. Newman, 'Social Factors in the Recruitment of the Bombay Millhands', in K. N. Chaudhuri and Clive J. Dewey (eds.), *Economy and Society: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History*, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 277–95, and M. D. Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854 to 1947*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1965, pp. 71–83.

25 See, for example, the issues of 28 November 1880, *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 4 December 1880, and of 28 January 1883, *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 4 February 1883.

26 *Din Bandhu*, 19 December 1880, *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 25 December 1880.

greatest persecution. The *Kesari* should realise that the lower castes would be mad to expect Brahmans to help in their social and moral regeneration, when for centuries they had acted to crush all high aspirations amongst them.[27]

The *Din Bandhu* maintained close links with the Satyashodhak Samaj throughout the 1880s and 1890s, carrying reports of its meetings, and letters and articles written by Phule and other members. We have already noted, however, that Lokhande's position on the issue of Maratha and *Kshatriya* status differed slightly from that of the Society. The attempt to appropriate the title of 'Maratha', with all its powerful symbolism, for the whole community of non-Brahman castes, formed one of the *Din Bandhu*'s most important ideological undertakings in this period. With great polemical agility, Lokhande levelled his campaign in three directions: first, at Brahmans, whose claims to share in Maharashtra's central social identity he denounced as at best a cultural misconception, and at worst a downright fraud; secondly, at some Maratha groups themselves, who wished to uphold the older application of the term in its restricted form, as applying to the narrow circle of elite Maratha families; and thirdly, at the government of Bombay. This struggle for the Maratha title underlay much of the institutional activity within the non-Brahman movement from the 1880s. It formed the subject of a running debate in the press between Brahman and non-Brahman writers, both of whom were acutely conscious of the impressions that such arguments might make upon the Bombay government. The *Din Bandhu* of 21 October 1894, for example, contained a lengthy article, entitled 'Are the Brahmans Marathas?', full of editorial strictures on a speech just made by the Governor of Bombay, Lord Harris, while visiting the town of Sholapur. Harris had committed the fundamental error, in Lokhande's eyes, of talking about Marathas simply as the Marathi-speaking Hindus of the Deccan. This went against all logic and all practical evidence about the culture of Maharashtra:

> Maratha means those of the Kshatriya varna. In this Kshatriya varna, there are 96 families, and many sub-families within these. The people who were born into these families are the true Marathas (Kshatriyas). Those who hold surnames from among these families can become Marathas; other people can never do so.

The *varna* of the Brahmans was quite separate, both structurally and in terms of culture:

27 *Din Bandhu*, 17 January 1886, *Native Newspaper Reports*, week ending 23 January 1886.

If, in this country of Maharashtra, the Brahmans could become Marathas, then even the Muslims and other people could call themselves Marathas. There is not to be found amongst those who call themselves Brahmans the similarity in manners and customs, in deities and religion, and in families and lineage, which there is amongst all the Maratha people. It is disgraceful that these beggar-priests should be claiming the same rank as their patrons. We can never ever allow the Brahmans to take the liberty of calling themselves Marathas.

It was particularly important that the government should not harbour such misconceptions:

Our Governor, Lord Harris, made a speech about Marathas which referred to them as the whole Hindu community of the Deccan. He made these observations because he had insufficient information. This whole business is most regrettable.

At the same time, Lokhande made a point of challenging attempts made by Marathas themselves either to restrict the application of the title, or to make it the basis for projects with aims less radical than those for which Lokhande employed the term. One of the most prominent of these was the Deccan Maratha Education Association, founded in January 1883, with William Wedderburn as its president, and Gangaram Bhau Mhaske as secretary.[28] Mhaske's association aimed to capture the issue of the cultivator and the backwardness of rural society in much the same way as other non-Brahman efforts. The association published a pamphlet in English in 1886, setting out the object of its concern:

It is a lamentable fact that the people belonging to the Maratha, Kunbi or cultivating classes, have been, owing to their deep ignorance more than to their admitted poverty, very backward in availing themselves of the advantages of the system of primary and secondary education established by government during the last thirty years and more.

Much the same imagery was used to drive home the argument that these sections of Maharashtra's population should be the first objects of public concern:

It is hardly necessary at this time to state that the Maratha and Kunbi population form the muscle and bone of native society. Their helplessness and ignorance is a national disgrace and a danger which is fraught with great evils to the whole community . . . This condition of things is by no means an inevitable

28 Gangaram Bhau Mhaske (1839–1901) was born in a village near the town of Nasik. While he was very young, his parents moved to Pune, where he was educated at a mission school. He qualified in 1876 as a district court pleader, but devoted much of his time to schemes of lower caste education. He took part in many of the campaigns of the Indian National Congress, and was very friendly with Tilak, Ranade, and Gokhale. See the account of his life in Sitaram Ramji Tavade (ed.), *The Deccan Maratha Education Association, Poona: Golden Jubilee Book*, (Marathi), Pune 1936, pp. 70–2.

evil. At one time, not very distant in the past, they numbered among them some of the renowned leaders of the Maharashtrian armies, and many filled its ranks. In fact, these classes were the mainstay of the Maratha power in its palmy days.

However, the association employed these arguments and symbols not to campaign for a fundamental diversion of resources and power to the whole community of the lower castes, as envisaged by Lokhande, Phule, and the like, but for the narrower and less radical purpose of

encouraging higher education among the non-literary and backward classes, such as Marathas, Kunbis, Malis etc. and for collecting funds for scholarships to be held in high schools and colleges.[29]

The association's first office-holders reflected this adaptation of an important non-Brahman argument to more moderate ends that would tend to serve a smaller non-Brahman elite, rather than the whole body of agricultural and labouring castes. Its general committee included the Maratha Chief of Phaltan, Bapu Saheb Nimbalkar; the wealthy Pune Maratha reformer, Hariraoji Chiplunkar; four Brahmans – Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Bhau Saheb Natu, and Shivaram Hari Sathe; and two members of the Satyashodhak Samaj – the prominent Pune doctor, Vishram Ramji Gholay, and the well-known Pune lawyer, Rajanna Lingu. It is also worth noting that Krshnarao Bhalekar joined the association at its inception in 1883, but resigned soon after.[30] Bhalekar gave no reason for this, merely mentioning it as an item on which he might enlarge in a future autobiography. However, the emphasis of Bhalekar's own Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha, founded just two years later, on the need for mass primary education makes it very likely Bhalekar resigned over precisely this issue of the association's 'elite' orientation. Another pointer to this divergence of opinion was the support given to its aims by the *Kesari*, support which was certainly never forthcoming for the Satyashodhak Samaj, or even for Bhalekar's Sabha. The *Kesari* of 27 April 1886 reported on its progress, commenting that the country would never make real progress while such a large proportion of its population remained ignorant. The paper urged that: 'Every well-to-do man, of every class, should lend help to this work.'

Until 1889, the association's funds remained rather limited, and its efforts were restricted to granting a small number of scholarships. In

29 *An Appeal by the Deccan Association for the promotion of education among Marathas etc.*, Dnyanprakash Press, Pune 1886.

30 Krshnarao Bhalekar, MS autobiography entitled *A short history of Krshnarao Bhalekar* (Marathi), unpaginated, Krshnarao Bhalekar MSS, Collection of Dr R. M. Patil, Pune.

that year, however, Sayajirao Gayakavad, the Maharaja of Baroda, made a large donation of Rs 2,400 per year, and the Maharaja of Kolhapur followed suit with Rs 300. With these increased resources, the association was able to extend its support, and from the late 1880s saw its efforts rewarded in a growing crop of non-Brahman graduates.[31]

Projects such as these presented a considerable problem for more radical non-Brahmans like Lokhande. On the one hand, there was the danger that the very symbols on which non-Brahman ideology relied for its power would be taken and subverted to more moderate and 'respectable' ends. An idea of the identity and needs of the Maratha community which was acceptable to the majority of conservative and high caste opinion would automatically lose their effectiveness as instruments of radical polemic. On the other hand, it was scarcely proper that one non-Brahman group should attack another with such eminently admirable aims as the promotion of higher education for the Marathas. The result, in the *Din Bandhu*'s commentaries on the association, was the ambiguous tone of grudging half-praise, with more left unspoken than said, which characterised so many of the exchanges between the different camps of the non-Brahman movement in this period. The *Din Bandhu* of 7 October 1894 reported on a meeting held to review the association's activities since 1890. However, the article said, the meeting was not well attended. The paper had often urged that branches of the association should be established in the major towns of the Presidency, and could not understand why this still had not been done. The association had done well in inviting some of the Bombay radicals to its meeting. It was by no means certain, however, that those who had benefited from its scholarships would then bring their new skills to help spread primary education to all lower castes. It was equally likely that they would follow the example of the Brahmans, who kept their educational advantages to themselves. The article also warned against political agitation, which it connected with the educational disabilities of the non-Brahman castes: 'The political movements of the Brahmans has made the task of getting the government to support education considerably more difficult. No one should have any illusions: we backward classes have been sacrificed to these activities.'

In response to institutions like the association, Lokhande set about giving an organisational basis to his own position. In 1887, he founded the Maratha Aikyaechchu Sabha, the 'Society for Maratha Unity'. Lokhande intended his new society to work, through fund-rasing and

31 Sitaram Ramji Tavade (ed.), *The Deccan Maratha Education Association, Poona: Golden Jubilee Book*, p. 5.

public propaganda, for the education and uplift of a Maratha community which united a very wide range of non-Brahman castes. The *Din Bandhu* reported on the seventh annual meeting of the society, held in June 1894. Its members included several non-Brahmans already prominent in other projects: Viththalrao Krshnaji Vandekar, a founding member of the Bombay branch of Bhalekar's Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha, Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru, one of the original members of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and Krshnarao Arjun Keluskar, the Bombay colleague of the 'moderate' non-Brahman leader Madhavrao Raghoji Rokade. A prize was given to the writer of the best essay on the plight of the lower castes, and members decided that such essays should be published, and copies distributed in the smaller towns and villages, to encourage people in their efforts at reform.[32] One member's speech made it clear that the disagreement with Mhaske's association extended further than the issue of education to the question of which castes should be judged to be Marathas, and therefore eligible for the association's support. The member proposed that the society should offer a few scholarships to poor children, so that

> it would not then be necessary to listen to Mr. Mhaske, the Secretary of the Deccan Association, telling us in reply to our humble requests that we are not Marathas, and that therefore we would not get a scholarship out of them.[33]

Beneath this apparent disagreement over the allocation of funds lay the same struggle for the less tangible, but ultimately much greater, power to be drawn from an exclusive possession of the Maratha title itself. In its own allocation of funds, Lokhande's society deliberately chose individuals from a wide variety of non-Brahman castes. A list of awards made to the poor and needy, published in the *Din Bandhu* of 1 April 1894, included a man of the washerman caste, a Telugu Mali, and even a Muslim. This awareness of competing claims to the Maratha identity also showed in the society's holding of annual festivities to celebrate the birthday of Shivaji.[34]

Lokhande challenged other such attempts to restrict the title of Maratha. The *Din Bandhu* of June 1894 carried a report on the efforts of Dr Dadaji Nathaji Shelake in setting up a 'Fund for spreading education among Marathas'. Shelake's appeal circular, which the paper

32 The society carried this scheme into effect a few years later: see, for example, the tract by Bapurao Ramachandra Avate, *The causes of the miserable condition of those backward in education, and the means of improving it*, Society for Maratha Unity, Baroda 1901 (Marathi).

33 *Din Bandhu*, 17 June 1894.

34 *Din Bandhu*, 9 June 1895. The paper protested that the society for Maratha Unity had been celebrating the birthday of Shivaji for several years, long before the beginning of the Shivaji movement in 1895.

reproduced, made it clear that he proposed to take as his social base only those within the Maratha-*kunbi* complex, and that he regarded these efforts as quite separate from the reforming and educational projects of other castes, such as the Malis. While it was certainly not true, the *Din Bandhu* argued, that the term should be so widely interpreted as to include Brahmans, because all their habits were so foreign, 'this is not the case with other castes. So it is a matter for surprise and sorrow that Dr Shelake should endeavour to point out divisions amongst his own people.'[35]

It was not until 1895, however, that Lokhande and other non-Brahman leaders faced the greatest challenge to their position when Bal Gangadhar Tilak succeeded in launching a broad popular movement, with strongly nationalist overtones, around the figure of Shivaji. The Pune leaders set up a fund in 1895 for the restoration of Shivaji's tomb at the fort of Raigad, and for the creation of a permanent memorial. The following year saw the first of the annual public Shivaji festivals in towns throughout the Deccan, under Tilak's direction.[36] Tilak's campaign had two implications. First, it actually succeeded in giving a new popular meaning to Shivaji's career, very different from that which Lokhande and others would have wished. Secondly, this new interpretation of Shivaji also implied a parallel new significance for ideas about the 'tradition' of Maharashtra itself, ideas which non-Brahman leaders had striven so hard to create and control.

From 1895, therefore, the *Din Bandhu* published a long stream of articles and letters against what it described as Brahman attempts to use the figure of Shivaji. A letter in the issue of 30 June 1895 argued that the work of providing a memorial 'should be done only by the Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaja's descendants, those whose sweat and toil today provide for the luxuries of kings, princes and other rulers'. The exact nature of the proposed memorial provoked much debate. The *Din Bandhu* of 14 July 1895 agreed that it was necessary to have such a memorial, but feared the intentions of the Pune group in charge of organising it: 'It will not do to set up a lingam in his name, put a nandadip nearby, get some priest to make offerings and sing songs before it, and call this a proper memorial to Shivaji.'[37] If it was made into some kind of temple, then the people would come to look on Shivaji as another incarnated Hindu god. There should be no hint of

35 *Din Bandhu*, 3 June 1894.

36 A good account of these festivals is in Anil Samarth, *Shivaji and the Indian National Movement*, Somaiya Publications, Bombay 1975, pp. 20–57.

37 The *lingam* is an emblematic representation of Shiva. The *nandadip* is the light kept always burning before an idol.

religion about the monument, which might be designed along the lines of the western memorials for great men such as George Washington, the Duke of Wellington, or Napoleon. The *Din Bandhu*'s fears here were not entirely a matter of conjecture. Ekanath Annaji Joshi's interpretation, which we saw in chapter 10, had presented Shivaji as an *avatar* in precisely this way.

The Satyashodhak polemicist Dhondiram Namadev Kumbhar set out the non-Brahman argument in its most radical and compelling form. The Brahmans, the perennial exploiters of the lower castes, now stooped to use the symbol of the great Shivaji to persuade the people to turn traitor against the British government, upon whom the hopes of the lower castes depended. Dhondiram concluded with a ballad on the meeting in the Hirabag in Pune, at which Tilak launched the Shivaji campaign:

> How can these faithless ones cherish respect for the Chatrapati?
> They do not pass on the gift of knowledge to others
> They kept the Chatrapati himself in ignorance . . .
> They brought Shivaji's descendants to ruin
> They attacked his honour at Hirabag
> It is the Kshatriyas who should feel honour for Shivaji
> The Brahmans should be singing the virtues of the peshwas.

He ended his letter: 'My non-Brahman brothers, I beg you earnestly not to get caught up in this excitement, and become traitors to the country. We will not get another government like the English.'[38]

Just as prominent as Lokhande in non-Brahman circles in Bombay was Madhavrao Raghoji Rokade (1839–96). Rokade came of a family of Maratha-*kunbi* cultivators in a village near the town of Junnar.[39] He showed exceptional promise at school, and his parents cherished the hope that their son might get an English education. They sent the boy to live with relatives in Bombay, where he attended the Scottish missionary Dr Wilson's school for poor children, in the district of Giragava. Having completed his secondary education, Rokade worked for a time as a clerk in a merchant's office, but then disaster struck in the shape of an illness which left him crippled in both legs. Undaunted, Rokade resolved to make his living as a teacher, and opened a small school in Bombay to which the local Maratha community sent their children. The school was a great success, and Rokade rapidly became known for his skill in bringing out the best in the most backward and deprived child.[40]

38 *Din Bandhu*, 23 June 1895.
39 The information here about Rokade is taken from Krshnarao Arjun Keluskar, *A short life of Madhavrao Raghoji Rokade*, Bombay 1927 (Marathi).
40 ibid., pp. 9–23.

Rokade also took a strong interest as different non-Brahman organisations and ideas gathered strength during the 1880s. He wrote regularly for Lokhande's *Din Bandhu*, but his contributions differed from those of more radical writers, such as Phule or Dhondiram Namadev Kumbhar. Keluskar recalled that 'His essays were dignified and full of information. Whatever subject he took in hand to write, he set out so that the people would be informed by it, and their opinions improved. He did not indulge in vain cursing and putting blame on others.'[41] Rokade's dislike of overt anti-Brahman polemic resulted in a public clash with Phule on one of the latter's visits to Bombay. Keluskar described how Phule came to give a lecture at Rokade's school. Lokhande took the chair, and a large audience was present. Phule called on his audience to get members of their own caste to perform their religious ceremonies instead of depending on Brahmans. Rokade rose to reply, and expressed his agreement with Phule's more general argument about the condition of the lower castes; but, he argued, the Satyashodhak Samaj would have to bear the consequences of fomenting much wider popular hostility to all Brahmans through the particular savagery of its attacks.[42]

Rokade's reluctance here did not, however, prevent him from taking part in the wider debate about religion. The *Din Mitra* of September 1888 reported that:

> A discussion has started about the religion of Brahmans and of other people in the meetings of the Society for the spread of morality in Bombay. Mr Pethe has taken up the cause of the Brahmans, and Mr Madhavrao Raghoji Rokade and Mr Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru that of the non-Brahmans. Many people from either side have gathered. The issue under discussion is whether the Brahmans deceive other people in matters of religion.[43]

The same issue, moreover, reported Rokade had taken a prominent part in the Shravan ceremonies of the Bombay Maratha community – the annual rites for the renewal of the sacred thread which was the sign of a *Kshatriya*:

> The Bombay Maratha Mandal's Shravan ceremony took place on the 12 August at the Kamathipuri school. Madhavrao Raghoji Rokade made an inspiring speech to the gathering about performing religious rituals for oneself. Then, the Shravan rites were started, and were carried out after the proper Vedic fashion. About 150 people were gathered. Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru, Bhanaji Bapujirao Angane, Balaji Viththalgavaskar Pandit, Dajirao Krshnarao Dalvi,

41 ibid., p. 29. 42 ibid., pp. 33–4.

43 Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru took the lead in setting up this society in Bombay in 1882. It aimed to spread an awareness of moral issues, without any bias towards any particular religion. Many non-Brahmans were members. The *Dnyanodaya* carried frequent reports on its meetings.

Dhanasharam Bhau Bhosale and others took much trouble over the proceedings.

Rokade, then, combined interest in Maratha and *Kshatriya* status with a belief that the best interests of the lower castes were not served by the most virulent of the Satyashodhak polemicists. The last non-Brahman organisation which we will examine here took a rather similar position. The 'Society of the Maratha caste for putting forward the dharma of Kshatriyas, and for the raising of funds for that dharma' was founded in August 1882 in Bombay. Its president was one Tukaramji Haraji Patil Salunkhe, and its secretary Bhanaji Bapujirao Angane was mentioned in the *Din Mitra* report quoted above.[44] By 1886, the society could show a total of 967 contributors to its funds, which stood at over Rs 1,600. The ideas and arguments of these members illustrate with startling clarity the directly political significance of claims to a Maratha identity and *Kshatriya* status. One of their main purposes, reflected in the society's title, was to define the qualities of the social group which might call itself Maratha *Kshatriya*, and to publicise its proper position in society. In a long speech entitled 'Kshatradharma', one member argued that the term *Kshatriya* derived from the word *kshatra*, meaning 'power' or 'authority', and drew his conclusions as to the proper role of *Kshatriyas* in society accordingly:

> The meaning of the word kshatra is power or authority. Those who go forward to oppose a hostile army see their proper role as exercising authority in this land. It is we who have to protect it with our very lives. The strength of those who strive on the field of battle with their comrades is the strength of the country itself.

It was not true that only Rajas could themselves *Kshatriya*: the term should be given to all those whose families had striven in the past to protect the country, and this included the humblest of soldiers. Moreover, the fact that many *Kshatriyas* had now ceased from practising their professions as warriors did not mean that they were no longer *Kshatriyas*:

> Even though Kshatriyas have taken up trade, agriculture and animal husbandry, this does not pollute their Kshatriya lineage, or their Kshatriya dharma. Even though they have acquired the arts of learning, they should not forget the use of their weapons. But they should take to earning their living through education if they can.

44 The main source of information for this society is the report of its proceedings between 1882 and 1886, published under the title *A Mirror of the Uplift of the Kshatriyas*, Bombay 1886 (Marathi), by its secretary, Bhanaji Bapujirao Angane. A copy of this report is in the Mumbai Marathi Granthasangrahalaya, Dadar, Bombay.

The speaker then turned to refute the arguments of those who suggested that Parashuram's wars with the *Kshatriyas* in ancient times meant that there was no true *Kshatriya varna* left in the present age. The accounts of Rama, Krshna, Yudhisthira, and the like proved that 'the Kshatriya varna is still in existence up to this present day'. He ended his speech with a list of the names of the ninety-six 'true' Maratha families, and a description of the great achievements of Shivaji.[45]

Another speaker set out the views of the society on the title of 'Maratha' itself:

> The name 'Maratha' has really only ever been given to those who were Kshatriyas. All other people were happy to accept the name of their trade as their caste-name; but the name of Maratha has come to be given permanently to all those who have kept their mastery of their own land, and who take pride in putting their lives at stake to protect it. Our habit of using Maratha for our caste name is really a matter for great joy: it means that our very name proclaims that we are the people of this land of our birth.

He gave a long account of 'The origin of the word "Maratha", and the subject of caste divisions', but explained at the start that he would sketch out only the broad outline of these divisions, in order to avoid disputes.[46] Another member complained that widespread misconceptions about the proper application of the term had arisen as a result of the historian James Grant Duff's work entitled *A History of the Mahrattas*, since it included the activities of many who were not Marathas at all. Like other non-Brahman groups, however, members always avoided precise definitions of all the castes who might claim the title.[47] Significantly, many of the speakers employed the Marathi term *bandhuvarga*, 'the class of those who are our brothers', denoting at once a broad community, but one which nevertheless possessed the cultural homogeneity which all non-Brahman polemicists ascribed to the non-Brahman community.

A strong but muted hostility to Brahmans and Brahmanic religion was evident in many of the society's proceedings. At its first annual meeting, held on 18 August 1883, one speaker told how:

> About 200 years ago, this Kshatriya, or Maratha class was in a flourishing state, as we can see from the histories of our country. From that time, however, their ruin began, as this valiant country fell victim to the devious religion which is now everywhere present.[48]

45 ibid., lecture entitled 'Kshatradharma', read 28 April 1883.
46 ibid., lecture entitled 'The origin of the word "Maratha" and the subject of caste divisions', read 10 February 1886.
47 ibid., lecture entitled 'Education', read 14 April 1883.
48 ibid., report of First Annual Meeting, 18 August 1883.

In common with all other non-Brahman groups, the society was intensely concerned to promote education and reform amongst the Marathas, and painfully conscious of the community's lack of the skills which were vital for any participation in the developing political life of the Presidency. One member gave a long lecture on the subject of education, complaining that 'It is hard to find five in a thousand of our people who can write well.' The persistence of older prejudices was as much to blame as the lack of resources. Most Marathas still followed the example of their fathers, and defended their lack of interest in education, saying: 'We are Kshatriya people – why should we educate ourselves? We should devote ourselves to learning the martial skills of dandapatta, and our life's purpose is accomplished.'[49] Another member drew attention to the Marathas' lack of experience when it came to holding meetings or taking joint action:

> Whenever our people gather together for some purpose of the caste, their behaviour gives cause for astonishment and dismay. They have no experience of conversing with one another in an appropriate way for polite company. Either they hold secret consultations with one another, or they make a point of displaying all their dislikes quite openly. Often, one man will make a fuss, saying who is this man sitting next to me – is he as good as me, and what is his purpose in choosing to sit here? They tire themselves out in such petty quarrels, and even when the work does begin, there is no rule about who may speak and what may be said.[50]

The remedy for all these deficiencies lay in fund-raising for projects of education and propaganda to heighten the community's awareness of the importance of unity and co-operation.

The society had direct contacts with the Satyashodhak Samaj and other non-Brahman groups. In May 1884, they organised a joint mass gathering in the town of Junnar, where they heard a famous performer of *kirtans* sing in praise of the *dharma* of *Kshatriyas*, and the evidence to be found even in the Hindu *shastras* for their proper authority in society.[51] In December 1884, a branch of the society was established in Thana, jointly with the Satyashodhak Samaj, and called 'The Society for Encouraging the Seeking of Truth and the dharma of the Kshatriyas'. Bhau Kondaji Patil lent his assistance, as did Govindrao Bapuji Patil of the village of Bhilar in Satara, who had been one of the very earliest members of the Satyashodhak Samaj.[52] Madhavrao Rokade was a frequent attender at the meetings of the society.

49 ibid., lecture entitled 'Education', read 14 April 1883.
50 ibid., lecture entitled 'Unity', read 10 March 1883.
51 ibid., lecture entitled 'The support given by the society to the kirtan singers', read 20 December 1883.
52 ibid., lecture entitled 'The Society's Branch', n.d.

A letter to the *Din Bandhu* of 15 April 1888 praised the work of the society, and the efforts of the secretary, Bhanaji Bapujirao Angane, in publishing the report of its proceedings:

> He has shown his caste brothers their proper Kshatriya descent, their duties and position . . . because of this, the book has found acceptance amongst all the Marathas, from the most illiterate to the very learned, and everyone is able fully to recognise his Kshatriya lineage.

The latter compared Angane's book with Rajaramashastri Bhagavat's work, *A few words about the Marathas*. Bhagavat's work had begun as a serial in the journal *Vividhadnyan Vistar* in 1885, and was published as a book in 1887. Bhagavat argued that no Maratha could claim an untarnished *Kshatriya* lineage for himself, since there had been such a mixing of castes throughout India's history. Moreover, the term 'Maratha' itself referred properly to all Marathi-speakers in western India, who were distinguished by a remarkable homogeneity of culture and religion. The author of the letter argued that Bhagavat had written the book as a result of the agitations led by Bhau Kondaji Patil in Junnar, with a view to fomenting quarrels and divisions amongst the Maratha *Kshatriyas*.

Religion and ritual in the 1880s

By the end of the 1880s, the performance of religious ceremonies without the assistance of Brahmans had come to occupy an important place in non-Brahman activity throughout the Deccan. Very frequently, these ceremonies were conducted with the Vedic texts which were appropriate to *Kshatriyas*. The *Din Bandhu* of 29 July 1888 contained a letter from 'A Maratha who cares for the welfare of his brothers':

> It is a matter for great rejoicing that the community in the Konkan has begun to follow the example of the Marathas of the Deccan. On 22 July 1888, Govindrao Bapuji Bhosale Khopkar, of Khed in Ratnagiri, now residing in Bombay, got the funeral rites of his sister Bhagubai done by a priest of his own caste, with Vedic rites. Our priest did not take any money, but did the ceremony according to the proper manner. The whole Maratha community should take note of this benefit, and if anyone is in need of a priest, he should contact the Din Bandhu Press at Bayculla, and he will be able to get all kinds of auspicious rites and ceremonies performed, at very small cost, according to the Vedic manner.[53]

Despite all these efforts, non-Brahmans encountered difficulties over the issue of ritual very similar to those experienced by the Satyashodhak Samaj in its early days. The *Din Mitra* of July 1888 carried an article by

53 The *Din Bandhu* contains numerous reports of such ceremonies from the late 1880s, which lack of space prevents us from examining more closely.

Krshnarao Bhalekar on the state of religious reform among the followers of the Satyashodhak Samaj. Bhalekar felt that current practices bore a dangerous resemblance to Brahmanic ritual: 'These Satya Samajians have taken on every one of the old rituals of the Hindu priests! All they have done is to get rid of the Hindu priests, and set up some from the Satyashodhak Samaj, and they call this reform!' Moreover, Bhalekar argued, the new religious freedom had produced a chaotic variation in the way in which ceremonies were conducted, from the texts that should be used to the details of arranging flowers and perfume:

> Some claim that we all have a right to wear the sacred thread; others dispute whether it should be worn around the neck or the loins; some say, we do our marriages with Vedic rituals, and others say we should use puranic texts; others still condemn both as just another excuse for Brahmans to fatten themselves. Some ask what is the use of sacred verses and the sacred fire in the marriage rite, and say that it is all an empty game. Others question what should be done in the marriage itself: should the bride put the garland on the groom, or vice versa? Still others ask what is important about the garland at all; just sound the cymbals, and the marriage is done. Some say, we will do our own Satyanarayan ceremony, and read out religious stories; others try to conduct their funerals without any visible rites at all! Others again conduct all sorts of pujas to images of Bali, Jotiba, Kalbahiri and Mahasubha!

Phule himself had attempted to bring some element of uniformity into Satyashodhak practices with the publication in 1887 of a small book entitled *All the Rites, Ceremonies and Verses used by the Satyashodhak Samaj*.[54] This laid down simple rules for the conduct of marriages, for the blessing of a new house, and for funerals. When this failed to alleviate the tensions and dissatisfactions described by Bhalekar, Phule wrote another work in the last year of his life, entitled *A Book of True Religion for All*.[55] This did not confront the issue of uniformity in ritual, but restated many of his earlier ideas about the nature of the divine, and the basic equality of all men.

Despite these difficulties, and the conflicts which bedevilled relationships between almost all non-Brahman leaders, they continued their efforts of organisation and propaganda right through the following decade. Most importantly, these two decades produced the individuals and the organisational experience which were to be the mainstay of the non-Brahman movement in the first two decades of the next century.

54 This is reprinted in Keer and Malshe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, pp. 330–39.

55 ibid., pp. 343–442. Lack of space prevents a fuller description of this work.

17
Epilogue: ideology and politics in nineteenth-century western India

By the time of his death in November 1890, Phule occupied a paradoxical position within the broader non-Brahman movement. On one hand, his labour had borne rich fruit in the creation of a broad popular movement around the ideas and symbols on which he had worked during the four decades since 1855. On the other, his uncompromising radicalism and his abrasive personal style seem to have left him rather isolated during the last years of his life. In 1889, he had suffered a stroke, which left him partly paralysed. As his health worsened, his friends became concerned that he and his wife would find themselves impoverished in their old age. In the absence of any other offers of support, the reformer Mama Paramanand appealed on behalf of Jotirao Phule and his family to Sayajirao Gayakavad, the Maharaja of Baroda. In his letter to Ramachandrarao Dhamnaskar, the Dewan of Baroda, and an active non-Brahman himself, Paramanand praised Phule's work:

> His last and greatest service is connected with what he calls the emancipation of the Maratha mind. To this he devoted his later life, and for this he wrote, preached, sang and voted as he preached, and it is to his single exertions, I believe, that the Maratha element in the Deccan and elsewhere shows that consciousness of its wrongs, its desire for amelioration and freedom from implicit submission to the higher castes merely as such which did not exist before.[1]

Here, Paramanand pointed to Phule's role in one of the most dramatic and enduring social developments of the period: the creation of a broad and distinctive 'Maratha' identity. As we have seen, Phule had always remained ambivalent about the title itself, and definitely hostile when it was used merely in support of claims to an elite status of an older kind. Moreover, this broad 'Maratha' identity held no central place for untouchable castes, and to this extent Phule's earlier dream of a united effort of all *Shudra* and *ati-Shudra* castes remained unfulfilled. Nevertheless, it was Phule who, almost singlehandedly, provided the re-

1 Mama Paramanand to Ramachandrarao Dhamnaskar, Bombay 31 July 1890, quoted in D. Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, p. 269.

interpretations of the past, the potent symbolism and the vivid imagery which was to form the ideological substance of this identity. With its self-consciousness, its conviction of a unique role in Maharashtra's history and wider cultural traditions, and its ability to assimilate a very broad range of non-Brahman social groups, this identity represented a startling new departure from older social and cultural forms, and was to be, in its own way, an instrument of radical social reform. In the manner of many newly created traditions, it rapidly assumed the status of a long-established cultural fact. Where it was perceived as an innovation, its protagonists presented it as an older truth, rescued from the obscurity into which their opponents had sought to cast it. Yet it was precisely the novelty of its rearrangement of older and very powerful symbols which gave the Maratha identity its great potential for the purpose of mass mobilisation, which might be used either to change the relations of power within western Indian society, or which might be directed at the British government. Capable of attracting great popular loyalty, its relative newness nevertheless meant that it was not yet clearly assigned to specific political or religious programmes.[2]

These tensions and rivalries between groups within Indian society form, moreover, a dimension of nineteenth-century politics without which our understanding of more familiar political movements remains partial and distorted. This applies particularly to what has often been defined as the most important process in Indian politics in the later nineteenth century: the extensions of the British administration, and the response of Indians to this in the construction of an organisational framework with which to engage the political institutions set up by the Raj.[3] This formulation takes no account of the experience of lower caste activists and their considerable following, nor can it assimilate the conflicts associated with the non-Brahman movement to the factional rivalries between elites seeking to control the new political institutions. This brings us back to one of the three questions which were asked in the first chapter: that of whether non-Brahmans can be seen as an elite seeking, like any other, to stand as the spokesmen of Maharashtrian society. Men like Phule certainly did represent an elite, taking the lead in fashioning from older cultural materials a new identity for a very broad section of western Indian society, and seeking to give this identity a real social and political existence. Yet this fact clearly does

2 For examples of this creation of new traditions in a wide range of historical and cultural settings, see the book of essays by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

3 See, for example, the study by Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1880–1915*, Cambridge University Press, 1973.

not mean that their political and ideological activity was indistinguishable from that of their opponents. The idea that elite-led conflict can have no real ideological content is based on a misconception about the nature of caste identities and movements themselves. This is the old notion that caste identities are social givens, so that movements based upon caste should have a natural or spontaneous origin, and should not need elites to lead them and define their identities. This study has tried to show, however, that caste, ethnic, and other group identities are not something static and primordial, but are the constructions of human action, and are subject to change as their broader social environment changes. It is here, in the constitution of new identities in response to such changes, that elites – the political leaders and ideologues that have the access to ideas and education, and relative leisure and affluence to pursue them – perform their crucial task.[4]

We have seen, moreover, the very substantial differences which existed between radical non-Brahmans, such as Phule, Bhalekar, and Lokhande, and their adversaries amongst the early nationalists. Non-Brahmans hoped for a long period of benevolent paternal rule under the British government, during which the lower caste community would have time to acquire the skills and resources which were needed if they were to take up their rightful place as the natural leaders of Maharashtrian society. Moreover, the whole ideology of *Kshatriya* status which non-Brahmans employed, both to support their contention that the main sources of power that lay within western Indian society had been taken out of the hands of its proper leaders, and to create a broad popular identification with this proposal, differed of necessity from the means used by their Brahman political rivals. While elites do indeed set out deliberately to capture symbols and constituencies, the examples of Phule and other non-Brahman polemicists show forcibly that such choices were not arbitrary, but were frequently determined by their own social experience and links with these communities. Indeed, this very linkage was one of their most important assets.

We turn now to the question of the longer-term origin of the non-Brahman movement in western India. This cannot be traced directly to massive caste antagonism in pre-nineteenth-century society. Rather, the tensions which provoked it, and the identities to which it gave rise, were of distinctly nineteenth-century origin. First was the perception that the political institutions of Indian society were developing in a way that promised great power to a small social group already in

4 I am indebted in this section to a most useful discussion on the question of ethnic identities with Professor Richard Fox.

possession of the religious authority bestowed by conventional Hinduism upon Brahmans. Second was the fact that this perception developed against the broader cultural background of a massive attack on the legitimacy of traditional religious values and social hierarchies. In the process of creating a new political and religious identity for the lower castes, polemicists like Phule certainly drew upon symbols, loyalties, and conflicts within traditional culture. Yet the ideological constructs that resulted went far beyond any of these.

I would like to turn finally to the question of non-Brahman ideology itself, and to ask whether it may help in explaining the massive growth of caste-based institutions which occurred in all three Presidencies towards the end of the nineteenth century. I would like to refer here to an essay by David Washbrook on the growth of caste associations in the Madras Presidency from the late 1880s, to illustrate how our understanding of such movements may be hampered by a failure to pay attention to the actual ideas and rhetoric of these new organisations.[5] The parallels here are not exact, but there is enough common ground for the comparison to suggest new lines of enquiry for what is a very difficult area. Washbrook describes the various kinds of caste organisation that arose in the Presidency from the 1880s. In some cases, such as that of the Arya Vaishya Mahasabha, the politicisation of the horizontal ties of caste were the clear result of economic forces, and improved communications, that brought about the growth of real communal connections. The origins of other kinds of caste organisation, in particular the numerous and fragmented attempts at unity amongst the agricultural castes, were more difficult to decipher. Although caste remained important as a status concept, the formal institutions of ritual and communal life were unimportant or had ceased to exist. Therefore, the pressures to create caste confrontations, and the machinery to transport them on to the mega-category level, were just not present. The operational category of politics was the faction in which members drawn from different castes were held together by transactional ties to a leader. In this way, the growth of caste-based institutions could not be explained by reference to patterns of continuity in the traditional institutions, or by any social history of castes or mega-categories that possessed no objective social existence.

Central to his own explanation is Washbrook's idea of 'the publicist': a small new urban service class, supported by the wealthy magnates of different caste and communal groups. Theirs was the task of conjuring

5 D. Washbrook, 'The Development of Caste Organisation in South India 1880–1925', in C. Baker and D. Washbrook (eds.), *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880–1940*, Macmillan, Meerut 1975, pp. 150–203.

up identities for regional, religious, and caste groupings, as the British government seemed likely to patronise each kind of community. This, he argues, helps explain the plasticity of India's political organisations at the end of the nineteenth century, and the startling phantoms which could be produced at the level of provincial politics. However, these phantoms were eventually to fill out and to acquire a real social existence as the British government tailored its policies around them.

This explanation has some applicability to caste ideologies in western India, and to the example of ideologues such as Phule. Yet I would like to take issue with it on some points, and to focus initially on one reason for the drawbacks of this and similar treatments of caste-based movements in this period. Despite his intention of trying to explain caste-based movements, Washbrook does not examine the identities which they claimed for themselves, or their own statements of their political purposes, and is therefore at something of a disadvantage in examining their relationship with contemporary political conflicts. In his account, the ideologies of caste unity appear either as an *ad hoc* vote-catching expedient made to the specification of rich patrons, or as one of many administrative fictions evoked by the policies of the British government.

Neither of these apply to the ideologies described here, or to the caste-based institutions associated with them from the early 1880s. What is most striking about them is their strong root, not in traditional caste antagonisms, but in the loyalties, symbols, and identities that were central to traditional popular culture, and their use of these traditional elements, given a strong new political twist, to forge a new common identity for the lower castes. Also very noticeable are the immense pains taken by different non-Brahman polemicists to give their work consistency, both internally and in terms of the real social phenomena that they sought to reinterpret in their writing.

Moreover, the evidence examined here suggests, for western India, quite a different timetable and set of influences behind the transformation of these new ideological constructs into actual popular identities. Far from being a phenomenon that only occurred some time after the initial projection of these new identities, and in response to shifts in British perceptions of Indian society, this transformation went on almost in step with the ideological formulation itself, and occurred in reply not to British expectations, but to the potent combination of traditional social symbols and new political perceptions that these ideological formulations contained.

A point worth adding here concerns the more general relationship between ideologies, the political leaders who seek to realise them, and

the process of political conflict that such a realisation usually involves. The possible roles that Washbrook envisages for ideologies of caste unity seem to reflect the notion that wherever it is possible to find an instrumental function for a belief, this means that it has been adopted for the advantages that it brings in contrast to beliefs that carry no benefits and are held for their own sake. This represents a two-dimensional view of human activities and beliefs, and is particularly inappropriate for the study of the relationship between leaders and the political movements that they organise. Even if an individual leader embarked on some political activity purely for his own gain, the very ideologies and political structures within which he would have to work would impose at least some degree of consistency upon his behaviour. This kind of consistency is certainly present amongst non-Brahman polemicists, a consistency which is remarkable in view of the extreme complexity and delicacy of the ideas which they employed, and their need to direct them simultaneously at very different audiences.

Some kind of instrumentality, moreover, whether emotional, social, material, or spiritual, appears in every human relationship and belief, but this does not mean that such beliefs are held without emotion and commitment. It is precisely the task of the historian to describe how these may represent a particular worldview which was at once firmly believed, but which had embodied in its perceptions of social and political life the hopes and fears of particular social groups. It is clearly difficult to convey the delicate tension between the drive to belief and the objective convincingness, in its own historical context, of the larger view of society and history which such beliefs propose. Yet these elements are surely the very features of political and religious ideology as a rival world-building activity which give it its great power to move men and women at all levels of society.

Bibliographic note

The sources and material used in this study that relate directly to Mahatma Jotirao Phule's career and ideas may be divided into three categories. The first of these is formed by the material that Phule himself wrote. A list of his published works may be found at the end of this bibliography. These have formed the single most important source for this study. As far as I am aware, however, there is no other substantial surviving corpus of material written by Phule himself. His letters and papers appear to have been lost, leaving a gap in our direct knowledge of his life and ideas that it is very difficult to fill from other sources.[1] Some of his letters are published in contemporary newspapers, such as the *Dnyanodaya* and the *Din Bandhu*.

The second category is of direct references to Phule by his colleagues and contemporaries, both European and Indian. These are plentiful, if somewhat scattered, and are of great use in building up a picture of Phule as an individual.

The third category is of biographical and secondary works concerning Phule. The material here is extremely difficult to use. Phule's central importance as a symbol in the twentieth-century non-Brahman movement, and the great interest in him as the hero of the lower castes that exists in Maharashtra today, means that it has become very difficult to tell fact from fiction in some of the accounts of Phule written in this century. Phule's earliest biographer was P. S. Patil, whose *The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule* was published in 1927.[2] Patil was himself a non-Brahman activist, who collected much of his material by writing in the early 1920s – some thirty years after Phule's death – to all those who had known him, and asking them to send in their memories of Phule, and any other information that they might have. The considerable body

1 We are told by his friend, Gyanoba Sasane, that Phule's son sold his books, letters, and papers to a merchant, who swindled the family: Gyanoba Sasane to P. S. Patil, Hadapsar, 14 March, 1927. P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur. Certainly, no corpus of letters and papers was available to Phule's first biographer, P. S. Patil.

2 P. S. Patil, *The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule*, Chikhali 1927 (Marathi).

of letters that resulted are now collected in the P. S. Patil MSS in Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur. These letters have two drawbacks. Firstly, they are impossible to document. Secondly, they often tell us as much about the formation of twentieth-century non-Brahman opinion, and of the formation of an agreed corpus of opinion about Phule, as they provide us with direct or independent information about him. This makes them, and P. S. Patil's biography, of fairly limited use for the researcher, and I have tried always to use them in conjunction with other sources. There is a further difficulty, which is that almost all of Phule's subsequent biographers have relied on the information given to Patil, thereby adding another layer of interpretation and unsupported assertion to what is already a very tangled body of information. The valuable exception here is Dhananjay Keer's work, which makes extensive use of independent contemporary sources.[3] More recent accounts are those by Y. D. Phadke, an excellent and very scholarly analysis of the activities of Phule's most important colleagues in the Satyashodhak Samaj,[4] and Gail Omvedt's pioneering survey of the non-Brahman movement in western India, from 1873 to 1930, which contains a very useful chapter on Phule.[5]

In the interests of conserving space, the following bibliography does not list the secondary sources which have been referred to in this work. Details of these may be found in the footnotes. In the following list of primary sources, English and Marathi works are listed together, and an indication given in brackets where the work is in Marathi. Published sources are divided into four categories: government publications, contemporary newspapers and periodicals, other contemporary printed sources (which includes primary source material which has been published for the first time, or republished in a form different from its original publication), and contemporary printed works.

3 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974.
4 Y. D. Phadke, *Vyakti ani Vichar: Kahi Anubandh*, Pune 1979 (Marathi).
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The Parsi Religion, as contained in the Zand Avasta, and Propagated and Defined by the Zoroastrians of India and Persia, unfolded, refuted and contrasted with Christianity, Bombay 1843.
Wujra Soochi, *The Wujra Soochi or Refutation of the Arguments upon which the Brahminical Institution of Caste is founded. By the learned Boodhist Ashwa*

Ghosa: also the Tunku, by Soobaji Bapoo, being a Reply to the Wujra Soochi 1939.

The Vajrasuci of Asvaghosa: Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyaya, Visvabharati, Santiniketan 1960.

Works of Jotirao Phule

1. *Tratiya Ratna*: *The Third Eye*. Phule completed the manuscript for this play in 1855, but it was not published in his lifetime. The first published edition is in the journal *Purogami Satyashodhak* (Marathi), vol. 5, no. 2, April–June 1979.
2. *Chatrapti Shivaji Raja Bhosale yacha Pavada*: *A Ballad of the Chatrapati Raja Shivaji Bhosale*. This work was published in Bombay in June 1869, and has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S. G. Malshe.
3. *Brahmanache Kasab*: *Priestcraft Exposed*. This work was published in Bombay in 1869, and has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S. G. Malshe.
4. *Vidyakhatil Brahman Pantoji*: *Brahman Teachers in the Education Department*. This ballad was published in the journals *Vividhadnyan Vistar* and *Satyadipika* (both Marathi) in July and June 1869 respectively. The comments that accompany the ballad in the *Vividhadnyan Vistar* suggest that the ballad was only one of a larger collection written at the same time. No copies of these have so far been recovered.
5. *Gulamagiri*: *Slavery*. This work was published in Pune in 1873. It has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S. G. Malshe.
6. *Memorial Addressed to the Education Commission*. Phule made a long statement to the Hunter Commission on Education in India in 1882. This was not published independently during his lifetime, but has been reprinted in the collection of his works edited by D. Keer and S. G. Malshe.
7. *Shetakaryacha Asud*: *The Cultivator's Whip-Cord*. This work was made up of a collection of Phule's speeches delivered to Satyashodhak audiences in 1882–3. He put these together and made a manuscript copy to send to the Earl of Dufferin. This manuscript is in the National Library of Calcutta. The work was not published during Phule's lifetime, but has been published in the collection of his works edited by D. Keere and S. G. Malshe.
8. *Satsar*: *The Essence of Truth*. Issues one and two, published in Pune in 1885. Phule hoped to make this into a regular series, but publication was discontinued after the second issue. Both of these have been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S. G. Malshe.
9. *Asprashyache Kaifiyat*: 'The Tale of the Untouchables'. This work was completed in 1885, but was not published during Phule's lifetime. The manuscript is in the P. S. Patil MSS, Shivaji University Library, Kolhapur.
10. *Satyashodhak Samajokta Mangalashtakasaha Sarva Pujavidhi*: *All the Rites, Ceremonies, and Verses used by the Satyashodhak Samaj*. This small book was published in Bombay in 1887, and has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and D. G. Malshe.

11. *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak*: *A Book of True Religion for All*. Phule completed this work in 1889. It was published in 1891, a year after his death, in Bombay. It has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S. G. Malshe.

Note: This list excludes letters and other small pieces published only in contemporary newspapers. A collection has been made of some of these in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S. G. Malshe. This list includes items that were written as independent works, although some of them were not published while Phule was alive. The original Marathi titles are followed by the English translations that have been used throughout this study.

Glossary

Marathi or otherwise unfamilar terms which occur frequently in this work

Arya here refers to the Indo-European tribes who invaded the Indian subcontinent about two millenia BC.

assal used as '*assal* Maratha' to mean one who is a real or genuine Maratha.

ati-Shudra literally, those beyond the *Shudras*: a general term used to describe untouchable castes.

bakhar one of the number of Marathi accounts of important episodes in the history of the Marathas, mostly written between 1700 and 1820.

Baliraj the notion of an ancient ideal realm ruled by King Bali.

bhakti a Marathi term meaning 'devotion'; used of Maharashtra's devotional tradition.

bhat a Brahman priest: often used in a hostile or derogatory sense.

Brahman the first and most sacred of the four *varna* divisions of Hindu religion, whose members in theory provided the priests, intellectuals, and scholars of Hindu society.

Chatrapati literally 'Lord of the Umbrella'; the title of the Maratha rulers of the house of Shivaji.

Chitpavan a sub-caste of Brahmans from the Konkan; the caste of the peshwas, who have played an important role in Maharashtra's history as governors and administrators.

Daitya a race of giants in Hindu mythology, usually portrayed as the enemies of the gods.

daksina the gift of money to a Brahman, institutionalised under peshwa rule, and converted under Elphinstone's administration to the Daksina Prize Fund, awarded on merit for the promotion of Marathi literature.

dharma the practices and duties laid down for the individual as his duty by virtue of his caste and position in society.

jati an endogamous caste or sub-caste generally.

joshi a priest, especially a village priest.

karma the enjoyment or suffering of the present life, which is the fruit of good or evil actions performed in previous lives, and hence to be accepted by the virtuous individual.

Kshatriya the second of the four *varna* divisions of Hindu religion, whose members in theory provide its rulers and warriors.

kulkarni the accountant and record-keeper of the village, and almost always a Brahman.

kunbi	a general Marathi term for a common peasant farmer.
Mahar	a caste of untouchables: Maharashtra's largest.
Mali	a caste of fruit-and-vegetable growers, to which Phule and many members of the Satyashodhak Samaj belonged.
Mamledar	a government official, responsible for collecting the revenues of a district.
Mang	a caste of untouchables.
Maratha	the dominant peasant caste of Maharashtra; also used as 'Maratha-*kunbi*' to denote an individual of lowlier status than the *assal* or genuine Maratha.
mavali	a general term for the men of the *maval*, the hilly region to the south and west of Pune, from which Shivaji draw many of his troops.
mofussil	a term for the rural hinterland of Bombay, or any large city.
moksa	the idea in Hindu theology of the final liberation of the spirit from the cycle of rebirth.
Patil	the head of the village, a hereditary office usually held by a Maratha or Maratha-*kunbi* family.
pavada	a Marathi ballad.
peshwa	a term for the Chitpavan Brahman ministers who served Shivaji's descendants, eventually exercising power in their own right.
purana	one of the sacred poems of the Hindus, supposedly eighteen in number.
rakshas	demons or enemies of the gods in Hindu mythology.
Ramaraj	the kingdom of Rama, an ancient golden age of the Hindus.
rshi	one of the Hindu sages of ancient times, in theory seven in number.
sabha	a Marathi term for a group or society.
sadhu	a holy man of the Hindus, who has withdrawn from wordly life and taken to wandering in search of religious truth.
samaj	a Marathi term for a group or society.
sarkar	a Marathi term for the British government.
Satyashodhak	literally, 'truth seeking' the title of the society started by Phule and his colleagues.
sarvajanik	literally, 'of all the people' the title of the early nationalist society prominent in western Indian politics from 1870 was the Sarvajanik Sabha.
Shankaracharaya	the name of the ancient Hindu teacher of Vedanta philosophy, applied also to the heads of the colleges or *math* founded by him, who became arbiters of Hindu religious rectitude.
shastra	a general term for the Hindu institutes of religion, law or letters.
Shastri	one who is versed in the above.
Shimpi	the tailor caste.
Shudra	the fourth of the four *varna* divisions of Hindu religion, which provides in theory the servants and labourers of the other three *varnas*.
Sonar	the caste of goldsmiths.

tirtha water made holy by a Brahman dipping his right toe into it.

twice-born used of the members of the upper three *varna* categories, whose male members are entitled to be invested with the sacred thread, signifying a second birth.

Vaishya the third of the four *varna* divisions, whose members in theory supply the material wants of Hindu society, as its merchants and traders.

varna one of the four hierarchically arranged categories into which all Hindus, with the exception of untouchables, are in theory divided.

Veda one of the most ancient writings of the Hindus, in theory four in number, and supposed to have been uttered by Brahma, and preserved by oral tradition.

INDEX